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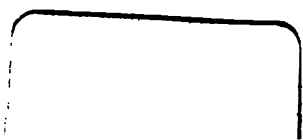
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# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

*By Mary Dyer Lemon*



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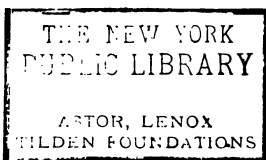
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MRS. S. H. WRIGHT  
"Grimpy"

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The Feb 4 - 18  
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**Grimpy Letters**

A Series of Letters Written  
by a Young Girl to Her Old  
Lady Chum.



By **MARY DYER LEMON**  
(POLLY DEE)

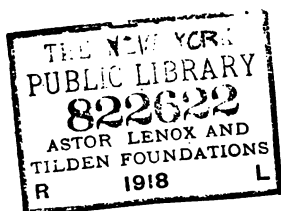


1917

**INDIANAPOLIS BOOK & STATIONERY CO.**

**Indianapolis, Indiana**

Five

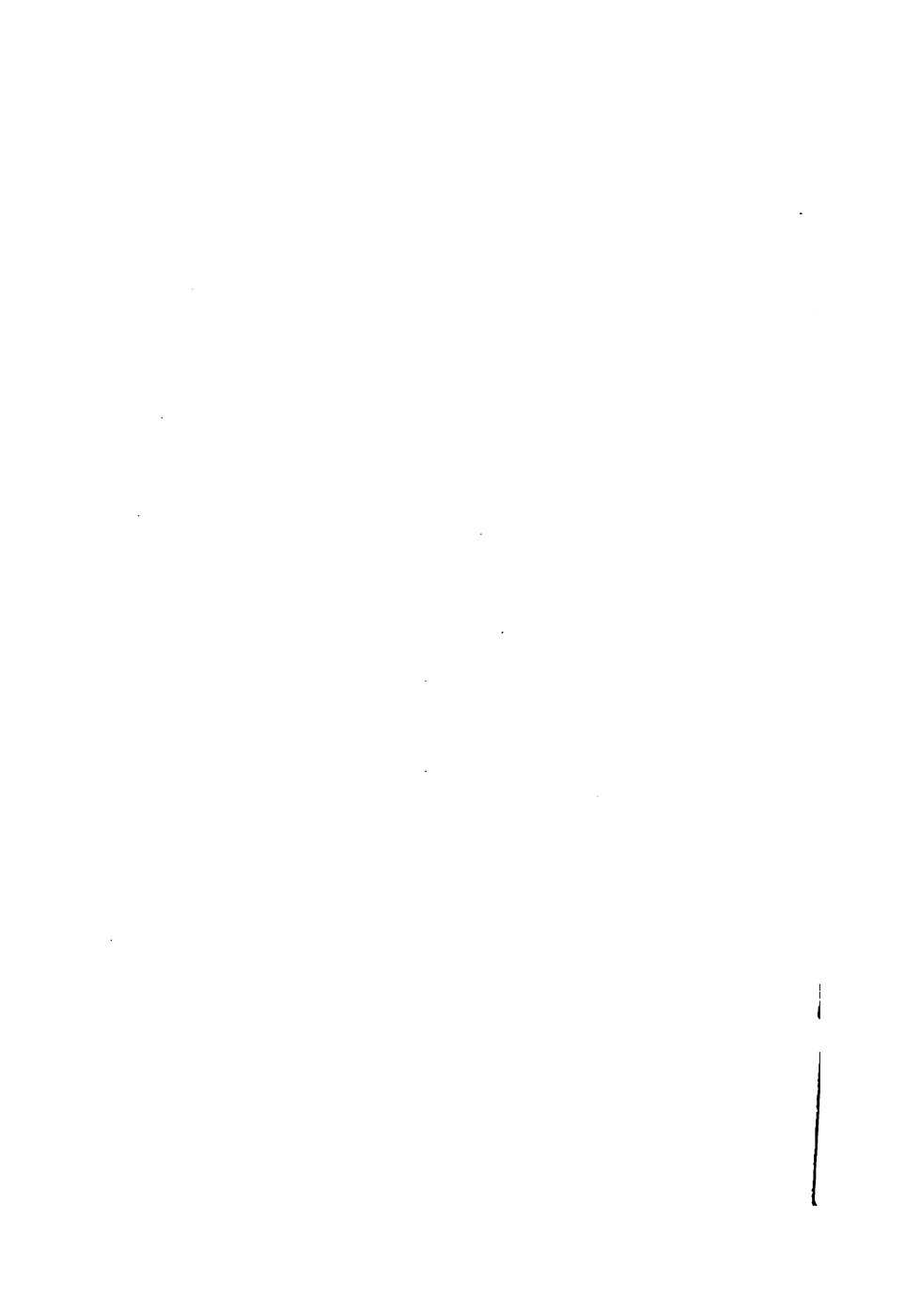


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NEW YORK  
CLUB  
FRANCE

\* Library Journal - Jan 30/18

DEDICATED TO—  
Why, to  
Mrs. S. H. Wright  
"GRIMPY"  
OF COURSE



# *The Grimpy Letters*

## I

Dear Chum Grimpy,—

I almost wish I were an old lady like you right now, in a peaceful pansy bonnet just like yours, and then it wouldn't be up to me to amount to something. I should already have amounted, and we could sit down quietly and rock and crochet and talk about how dear and good your Major was and my—my Colonel, we'll say, when they were living. Ambition is such a nagger. Napoleon must have been a miserable little fellow.

The rub was this, dear Grimpy: I received our college Alumni News Letter a few days ago, published every so often, which told of all the wonderful strides my classmates had made at



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

home and abroad, playing missionary in places with queer heathen names, pitching ball for big leagues, practicing law in New York, teaching school and mining in Mexico—and I, being little Merry Sunshine at home, totally eclipsed by a grouch of late that won't rub off. Since then I have haunted the want ads and applied to all the family guests for a job. But Grimpy dear, don't ever be fooled by a want ad, and send ten cents, no matter if they promise you half of their kingdom in return. They are trifling—all of them.

Then just this morning remorse was once more mine when I received a can of delicately scented pink Jasmiol cold cream of which Jabe, my college roommate, is the sole manufacturer. Think of it, dear lady! Our plans for her had been grand opera, but if she can earn a little honestly—cooking and canning cold cream, why not? Don't you think you need a can, fifty cents f. o. b.?

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Truly, my dear, methinks I remember your face looked a trifle smudgy when I told you good-bye—the smudge that defies all soap and water. Can I put you down for one can? You'll never use any but Jasmiol after that! There—all joking aside—would I make a good saleslady or not? What am I good for, anyway, except to hold down a nice little corner of your heart? Tell me.

The day after Christmas it is, when one feels more like purring around among one's presents than anything else, and dipping into many books. I have read the first chapter of all my new ones and Sis has read the last chapter of all hers! It's a habit she has of reading the last chapter first. Just now, between Christmas and New Year, is the one time when it seems perfectly honorable to dabble—to flit from one thing to another, humming-bird-like, and not finish anything. Even

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

mother has been found several times to-day lolling—actually lolling among pillows—with a box of candy, reading “Vanity Fair.” Housekeeping sits lightly on cheek and brow. The spirit of peace and good-will promises to outlast even the turkey, and everyone is so amiable it is actually embarrassing at times. By New Year we’ll all stiffen up again, and a host of conflicting resolutions will be put into action.

I am glad that Christmas means to me what it does. I should hate to think that a red candle was nothing more to me than just—a red candle. It smells of spruce and suggests bells, animal cakes, legends and children. Don’t tell me, dear lady, that a big red bow on a holly wreath doesn’t give you a sudden feeling of gladness. You may fool some folks with your flat, outspoken way and your serious face, but the Major knew you better, and so do I. Your heart is

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

as soft as his and you can shout with laughter, with your face in perfect repose. Don't tell me!

Well, dear lady, I am forgetting to dabble, if I write much more to thee.

Love,

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## II

Dear Grimpy,—

Mercy! who named you anyway? It sounds as if you might have been dubbed by your mother while she was making a train. You were worthy of more attention than that. Or were you very unpromising as a baby?

O, I held the sweetest little bundle of a baby yesterday, just two weeks old, and he has the substantial, biblical name of David. His mother and I were little girls together, and now we smiled again as she said, "Wouldn't you like to hold this new big doll of mine?" He was so warm and cuddling, I pretended for one wee little minute that he belonged to me.

It isn't wrong to pretend, is it Grimpy? Think how much fun we should have missed if we hadn't played

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

that you were worth pecks and oodles. The Major didn't quit pretending once, did he? So much did he talk about his bale of money, from which he would pinch off a hundred or so whenever we expressed a desire for it, that he seemed to convince us it was back in the room under his bed. Knowing then as we did that we could have other and finer things if we wanted them, we lost all desire for baubles.

Grimpy, why couldn't you and the Major always have lived across the street from me, so that I could run over and eat biscuits and red gravy with you whenever I felt "the vision" slipping away? Pretense is after all not such a terrible thing. It's all in the way one handles it. Sopped in red gravy it is most digestible.

The neighborhood has been in a deep lethargy of late. Nobody's dog has bit nobody's child; no pins have been swallowed; no extravagances indulged in.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I suppose there is much cause to be grateful. We girls met at the Rabbs' Saturday, and after playing five hundred till bedtime, compared families until midnight. Upon comparison we found them of surprisingly the same stripe—fathers predisposed to periodical grouches, mothers unwilling to admit we have grown up, and the rest of the family averse to seeing things from our angle.

It seems a general characteristic of fathers to be immune from table manners. Someway they can't see any necessity for doing differently from what they used to do back when they were boys. Miriam says her father has a cheerful habit of simply piling up the guest's plate in an effort to be hospitable. The Rabb father was reported never to pass anything nor ask for anything, so that Mrs. Rabb must spend an anxious meal time watching his plate to be sure he is well nourished. Our

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

father's chief glory is in using the carving knife for his own private purposes, after he has served the meat. Buttering with such a weapon, he must look a trifle dangerous to a guest.

In a twinkling the conversation changed to seamstresses and oh, oh, oh—how our brothers treat them! It seems to be boy nature to object to having a dressmaker around and to let her know it if possible. We are having one now, Grumpy, and discord reigns supreme. Bud acts peeved the moment mother calls him down to lunch, says he doesn't see why that woman didn't get married, ends by ignoring her completely, eating ravenously and making mother generally uncomfortable. Father rather encourages Bud in this, coughs and crosses the other leg when Miss Morris passes through the hall, then talks for the rest of the evening on hard times, and folks never being satisfied with what they have. But just



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

wait! By and by, some evening, I'll put on my new frock for dinner, and father will look my way and say a little proudly, "Daughter, you are looking well this evening!" Oh, I know him!

But these seamstresses, passed around among our neighbors, do gather a surprising amount of gossip. Do you suppose it's wrong to listen? (If you think so, please refrain from answering this question.)

Now that it's winter time and cold, brooms, raffled doilies and buttermilk soaps are presented at our doors with pitiful stories—and one wishes for a bale of money more than ever. You know we have always loved to plan how we would give a few old faithfuls of ours a million apiece some day—Klaas our Dutch milkman, Molly, the colored washerwoman and William, colored, who used to clean for us. But one just can't do as well by every one who comes to the door.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

It's such a comfort to have the Harkers up the street, for we understand they give to everyone. So we ease our consciences by thinking that if it is an angel unawares, it will get fed and duly clothed up there.

I'd love to see you tonight, Grimpy, and sit down on your lap (if I didn't already know what an uncomfortable lap it is!) and just plain rest.

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### III.

Dear Grimpy-lady,—

Days that are fullest and sweetest happen quite accidentally, I find. This morning I ran back way up to Jean and Betty Rabb's to get a crochet pattern. Jean was ironing and as their kitchen was inviting with the morning sun in it and with the pleasant smell of newly starched clothes, I dropped into a chair while we talked of cabbages and kings. By and by Betty came out, and then there was nothing that we left unplanned in our future. Such a fascinating discussion could not well be broken into, so I stayed to lunch. Betty was supposed to set it out; but just when she was about to decide to toast some bread, she would happen to remember another plan she had for her house or her garden, and the only use

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

the toasting fork was put to was to mark out in the air the shape of her flower beds. We ate on the little kitchen table covered with a newspaper, and thought what a bore life must be to those who live in houses with much drapery and many table-cloths, with no variation of even a Sunday night lunch on the porch or a hand-out from the refrigerator.

Things taste so good at the Rabbs', not alone because they are such excellent cooks, but they are such a houseful, and always wishing for something to eat. It gets contagious, and Miriam Prentice and I, who have a way of wandering in there at meal time, eat at their hungry table when we couldn't be induced to eat at home.

The other evening we both happened in just about dark to see Aunt Margaret who never gets outside the house, but sits in her wheel chair all day long and makes tatting. Mother Rabb seems

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

to understand wonderfully, and asked us if we would care to stay and have toast and tea with the girls. Mr. Rabb and son Robert would not be home to supper. Their round old-fashioned mahogany table with the pretty China and silver, the electric toaster, and the blue tea pot decided the matter. We would stay.

A rose in a delicate little vase on the piano put Betty and me in a fine mood for talking wandering girl-talk, and wishing out loud. I don't know whether to describe the Rabb living room to you, or just let you sense it as we go along. Perhaps if I told you more about the Rabbs, you could guess what their living room would be. Living rooms generally label a family. There are very few people like the Rabbs, which to my strange way of thinking makes them intensely interesting.

They idealize everything that comes into their lives. As a matter of fact,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Grimpy, I suspect you would call them plain. But they always seem to see themselves as in a book. They do their own work, and consider all who don't do theirs mere makeshifts in the world. The few good pictures on their walls mean infinitely more to them than pictures generally mean. They make them a positive factor in shaping their lives. There hangs a wonderful Madonna above the piano,—one I think that you have never seen; but the Rabbs particularly like it. "Christ among the Doctors" hangs on an opposite wall near their books. And O, their books! You see I can't tell you about their living room without telling you about them; they are so a part of one another. They have old-fashioned bookcases with glass doors that you unfasten with a key. There isn't a single set among them. Each book came separately and was much thumbed and cried and laughed over before Mrs. Rabb could see her

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

way clear to get another. So these books are a ragged lot and their very dimness endears them to you straight-way. Their pages fall out and they persist in lying open (as you fondle them) at the love scene in the summer house in "The Crisis" or where Jo cut off her hair in "Little Women." There is the old-fashioned square piano, too, with the yellow keys. On Sunday evenings we gather around it, and sing the dear old hymns that give one such a sense of peace and love. It keeps us liking the things we ought to like.

One night we had candles and the light they threw on the Madonna was beautiful to see. We sang reverently. When Robert walked in and looked at the candles, he smiled indulgently and said, "I know Betty suggested that."

And so, Grimpy, do you wonder that we love the Rabb living room and the Rabbs? There is such a sense of freedom there and always someone to sit down with you and talk.

Lovingly yours,  
POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### IV.

Grimpy Dear,—

This promised to be nothing more than just wash day with all its unpleasant effects upon the family's disposition, so I got up with a very weary determination to live it up quickly and get it behind me. To top things off, mother was sick. Old Katie, the washerwoman, was in a dreadful fidge over the size of the washing and kept remarking that there was "the out-doinest lot of handkerchiefs this week". It took all the tact and ingenuity that Sis and I could muster to bring her back to her normal self; but we felt that the crucial point was past when in a burst of confidence she offered to show us her petticoats. There were five of them—as clean, Grimpy,—and ingeniously made of bed-ticking, old quilts and worn-out,



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

knitted shirts. We looked her over layer by layer with no little curiosity and delight. Then I read "Vanity Fair" to mother until she fell asleep.

After I had fixed a bit of lunch for Katie, I went upstairs to dress when Betty burst in as she always does and begged me to go with her over to Mary Wood's to hear their new Hawaiian music. We dearly love it, Grimpy,—it's so sad and wailing. It would draw "iron tears down Pluto's cheek," I'm sure. Before we left, the mail arrived with a belated Christmas card from a dear awkward lad whom I met at a sanitarium several years ago. He can't seem to forget me, Grimpy. I have a guilty feeling that I played with his heart a little. Well, anyway, I opened his card—I know it was the only one he could find in his little town—celluloid, tassels, and shepherds with flocks looking through a hole the shape of a heart; but with a kind little mes-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

sage in verse. And there stood Betty looking on—fine in her tastes and schooled in art all her life. But I must not wrong him. Celluloid and tassels may carry bigger friendship than many a tastily engraved card I have received. Betty likes the sound of Peter. That's his name. And so do I. It has such a dyed-in-the-wool ring to it—someone large of feet and scarce of words, but true blue—that's the type that Peter always is in story.

Then we lost ourselves in the Hawaiian music and enjoyed the Woods' big comfy chairs and the fine old living room, and their toy Pomeranian poodle, "Vanity." Once or twice Mary left us to entertain ourselves. With just Betty in the room, she becomes part of the music, and we lapse into our own sweet thoughts.

Mary admitted to us in a weary tone that she was glad we had come over, as she was terribly lonesome. The next

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

time Betty had a chance, she whispered, "Oughtn't she to be happy—look—just everything!"

"Think of it," I said, "no Kate washing and steaming up the house—no unsightly underwear hanging on a suspended broom in front of the fireplace in the hall."

By and by the tinkling little tea table was brought in. Really, Grumpy, at times it seems as if I were meant to be rich. I feel so used to it when I am in its midst. Betty says I drank my tea with a lovely languor that was most amusing. The truth is I was "powerful" hungry. We had been in such a stew all morning I had forgotten to eat my lunch. What a Cranford atmosphere tea brews! I don't see why even poor folks like ourselves shouldn't call time off to tinkle a little over teacups. Then, alas! we came home to be met at our respective doors by our respective sisters, broom in hand, suggesting that



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

we'd better come in and Hawaiian a little around home. Poor Rip Van Winkle with his fussy frau—poor Socrates with his Xantippe!

Grimpy, I don't believe after all that I want to be bonneted and old—not just yet anyway. Do you mind?

Don't you think that this verse is a nice one to receive on a Christmas card?

“Words but feebly can express  
All my heart's desire for you,  
For your perfect happiness  
And true joy your whole life  
through.”

It's getting too dark for me to see.

As ever,

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### V.

Grimpy, my dear,—

I, in my new green suit, am all neatly covered with cat hairs—and I don't mind if I am. If you could only see him—the loveliest big white Persian cat you could ever imagine, named "Omar the Rent-maker."

You are doubtless frowning this minute and wishing I would begin at the start. Well, here it is: Emily, Ethel and I piled into Ethel's little machine and were whisked out to Blanche's in a trice, this dark, rainy Sunday. I don't know of a pleasanter place to be on a wet day than Blanche's—'way back among the trees, through a long drive-way that keeps you in a delightful state of anticipation.

A big wood fire in the fireplace was waiting for us, where we toasted all the dampness out of our clothes and hearts.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Why is it, Grimpy, that firelight always makes girls—well, not exactly sentimental, perhaps, but croony at least, and womanly all at once? Each talked of the things in life she wanted, and ambition unrealized seemed quite within hailing distance. The fire heightened the color in their cheeks and mine felt pleasantly warm. Blanche struck unconsciously an artist's easy pose, standing with her back to the fire and her long white arms stretched out across the low mantel piece. She showed us some of her pictures too, done in oil and pastel—from real life.

Just here the cat came in waving his wonderful tail, and we amused ourselves with him while Blanche brought in her tea cart. Grimpy, do you suppose some people always have whipped cream on tap, and don't have to talk it over in the kitchen beforehand and order it two days early? Anyway, here was hot chocolate and whipped cream,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

wonderfully fluffed, and angel food! Even the Dresden china looked quite edible. Well, I think I never felt so comfortable and care-free in all my life. It was as if my fortune had been made, and I was leaning back to enjoy it. It was my fire, my cat, my tea, my china, my friends! Then we had music and Blanche said as she played "O Moon of My Delight," "Let's have the lights low. I can't help liking these dear slushy classics."

The ride home was cold and clear, but I think we all felt a strange gladness in our hearts, like the one in rhyme who had "rings on her fingers and bells on her toes."

Grimpy, if I ever have a daughter, I'm going to begin to impress upon her as soon as possible that she was born to do really great things, and I'm never going to let her believe anything else. It needn't make her vain and unlikeable, for she must believe the same of

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

all mankind. At any rate, Betty and I have agreed not to be wet blankets on the dreams and aspirations of our offspring, as our mothers are. It's weary work to rise above your family's common-place notion of you, to the genius that you know you are.

It was only yesterday that Betty and I sat down together in the Rabb sitting room to talk matters over unmolested. Mrs. Rabb, as we thought, was sound asleep on the davenport. Betty paints dear little sketches, full of atmosphere, and of late I have dipped a little in verse making. We could collaborate and publish one of those little volumes kept on parlor tables—to be read in snatches at odd times. How much would it cost, did we suppose? (It seemed too bad that money had to receive any consideration in such an aesthetic undertaking.) "O, not very much," I said, anxious to dismiss that question as soon as possible. At



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

this moment Mother Rabb stirred herself to say from the depths of her couch, "Thousands and thousands of dollars! Do be practical!" That settled it. Until then I had felt I could go home and reel off a quantity of very tolerable verse. Now we each had only a lump in the throat. It must take a deal of egotism to make a mark in the world.

Did you ever aspire to be great, Grimpy, or did you always somehow know that by and by your Major would come along?

Just here Emily D. brought her big artist brother out for a short call. He is truly a wonderful man from New York, Grimpy,—carries a gold headed cane and says "Yes?"—New Yorkily—to everything you say. But I couldn't help liking him when I found him most vulnerable and tender on the subject of cats.

I must hush, dear lady.

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## VI.

Dear Grimpy,—

We are snow-bound, and what a nice lot of jobs we are getting “off our list” because no one comes in to bother. Snow-bound from all but you, dear chum, and “all the king’s horses and all the king’s men” couldn’t pile snow high enough between us to keep me from talking to you. We’d tunnel right through. Oh, we’d talk, “by dummy”, as our Major would say.

While we were eating dinner last night we heard the first sleigh bells this season, and we all began to tell at once of the few lovely sleigh rides we had taken, and how we nearly tipped over! Father said he’d just every bit as soon sit with his feet in a tub of ice water and ring a dinner bell!

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I forgot—we did have one caller to-day. It was Klaas, the milkman. What would life be without Klaas? At times he is the one sensational spot on the horizon. When life gets too gray and dull to be tolerated, something awful happens to Klaas—his wagon wheels get stolen; he gets struck by a street car; and by and by he marries a red-headed, cross-eyed Irish girl, June, who carries the milk when Klaas is abed from a smash-up. The way she can mount that wagon while it is going would do credit to any street car conductor.

For two days Klaas had not appeared. Four empty milk bottles adorned our step, and our meals had to be planned accordingly. No Klaas—no milk! This afternoon he came. I asked him in and called mother.

"Been in trouble again, Klaas?" we asked.

"Yes, been in trouble and in jail, too,"

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

he said, with the sickly smile of an optimist.

"In jail? Mercy! Sit down," we said in chorus. "What for?"

"Me and my wife, June, had trouble, and she beat up on me," he said, feeling a long, bloody scratch on his left cheek.

His story was long and rare, one of domestic infelicity brought about by the interference of a mother-in-law. At times he spoke almost tenderly of June, all the time with his hand to the scratch on his face. Every now and then he would philosophize in some such way as this, "Life is a funny thing, ain't it—in jail one day and out having a good time the next." Klaas is a fatalist. At one time he invested in Louisiana land and soon after found it located at the bottom of a lake; but he is still hopeful of stock he has in a gold mine. He has a funny way of talking, Grimpy,—as if something hot were in his mouth. His lower jaw hangs looser and looser, and

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

then with one big swallow he summons all his features back into place and begins over again.

Now here, Grumpy, is something to astonish you. I have been saving it for the last, as I love to save my icing! I want you to be every bit as glad and excited about it as I am. I'm going 'way off for the winter—down where "there ain't no snow"—to San Antonio, Texas! (Just here I hope your crochet basket slips down out of your steep lap, and spills your spools on the floor in sheer surprise.)

Forget your dignity, Grumpy dear, and do something really absurd. It isn't enthusiastic just to look over one's "specs" and say mildly, "Do tell!"

I must admit there is always a delightful fascination for me in the place I have never seen. I don't believe I'll ever be satisfied until I hunt out all the corners of the earth, and watch all the wheels of the universe go round. I love

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

to meet new folks and get a brand-new point of view. It's the wanderlust. I think I must have had a gypsy great-grandmother. My own family can't be pried from their daily routine, but I always feel somehow when I get into a Pullman that I've gotten back home again.

Don't say "San Antone", Grimpy, as a lot of people do. Thank heavens, you have had the good sense to grow old gracefully. One day when you were telling one of your funny yarns, somebody near me leaned over and whispered, "Isn't she a peach of an old lady?" "Sure," I said, with a swagger, "she's me chum!" But Grimpy, don't let this turn your head. I may as well be frank with you—you are not what I would call a pretty old lady, but your stories and independent air surely make you most charming and chum-mable.

They say San Antonio is very gay in

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

winter. "Maybe I'll need a party dress", I cooed to myself. But mother shook her head and said, "Remember your health, daughter, and whatever you do, try not to have a good time!" I don't know of a better tonic myself, but mother and I can't agree in the matter. I have had such wonderful times when sent away to sanitariums and watering places. Mother knows my tendency, and is planning to send me this time in a straight-jacket, I think.

Yours ready to pack,  
POLLY DEE.

P. S.—Just one moment, lady. Don't you think it would be the part of prudence to tuck in a little yellow satin, with slippers to match? Remember how you schemed that time to get that polonaise!

P. D.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## VII.

Dearest Grumpy,—

At last I am on my way south. I shall be out two days and two nights, and so far I've been very busy. I find my belongings have to be packed and unpacked about every thirty minutes. I intend to invent a traveling bag with a door in the bottom.

To all persons contemplating a trip abroad, I recommend a preliminary ride on the M. K. and T., to get their seaman's legs. However, there is a very seamanly lot of folks on this car. No one grumbled about his night's rest, and all act as if they might have been somewhere before. After leaving this rocky boat, I feel as if I shall never walk like a landlubber again. I reminded myself of Charley Chaplin, in the dressing room this morning. It was



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

a matter of life and death when one missed an armhole. I tried to be glad that there wasn't any more space to rattle about in. I wonder if anyone could ever get entirely reconciled to drinking ice water out of envelopes and combing one's hair from memory. Certain women seem to have the gift of traveling immaculate, and come out of their cubby holes in starched waists and terribly complicated coiffures, looking as fresh as buttercups. Take what precautions I may, I always look as if I had slept in my clothes and feel mucky generally.

Do you think it's terribly plebeian to eat a boiled egg in a Pullman? I never feel that it's quite safe to start out without an egg and an orange in my pocket.

Later: I have just been to the diner, Grimpy, and enjoyed the tinkling of silver and the ice water. That's just about all we poor folks can afford to en-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

joy. But I find it best simply to go in with a spirit of abandon. They're bound to rob you, so it's well to go expecting it. Once in this frame of mind, I grow reckless with tips and seem to forget my past life altogether. Who cares whether a slice of bread costs ten or twenty! On with the dance!

Just one blunder I've made. I spoke to the wrong man and oh dear! so cordially! In the dim light I thought he was the gentleman who was so kind to me on the other train. I was in hopes maybe I'd lose him, but he played seven-up across the aisle from me all morning and the head waiter faced us in the diner. He wears a confused look as if he were trying to locate me among long forgotten friends.

All train men affect to be deaf and dumb—and imbecile too. They would give the impression that they "don't know nuthin." When our train was an hour late leaving St. Louis, we passen-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

gers seemed to be the only ones who knew that an engine could not be found to pull us. Whoever heard of an engine being mislaid? Someone finally conjured up one, and it is gradually pulling us away from ice and snow. Overcoats are getting scarcer, piccaninnies more abundant, and we see an occasional open door.

We have with us, it would appear, the general manager's maiden sister, and she is making a convenience of all of us and quite a nuisance of herself. Having been apprised who she is, we try to be patient.

Just now we seem to be running a race with the daylight, and a most gorgeous prairie sunset is looking on neutrally. Everyone has skipped over to the west side of the car—except two lovers. They don't know where to look for a sunset, and are foolishly hunting for it in each other's eyes. Perhaps they see it there—I don't know. One

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

must have a lover to find that out for himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Arrived in San Antonio!

Well, here I am! This town is so quaint, Grimpy, like some fine old Spanish relic. I can easily imagine I am in old Madrid. Of course, all I've seen of it was from the carriage window, driving up from the station. There are a lot of venders, and it smells very "bananowy" in spots. I have a suspicion that the cabman drove me around Robin Hood's barn, we wound in and out, and back and forth so many times. When we finally stopped, I said, "Really, I'm in no hurry. Suppose we wind around some more." But he pretended not to understand English and began helping me out.

I know something else I might tell you—nice, too,—but I mustn't. Sweet dreams!

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### VIII.

Dear Chum,—

You poor dear, is your nose red, and are you chattering up north while we are so balmy down here? We swelter in coats, but still we wear them—because it is February. “I am sitting by an open window.” In some such words as these, southern tourists love to couch their messages back home to taunt their friends. But it doesn’t always signify, Grimpy. Mother and I, when in Florida, wrote back to our poor snow-bound family about the sunshine and flowers, and pulled off our coats in every kodak picture, then sneaked a hot water-bottle to bed with us. But, cross my heart, I have acquired a neat coat of tan in the last few days.

I am now beginning a new series of roommates and I find it immensely

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

broadening. I had quite an outlay of them once, while staying at the Girl's Club in Denver; Sis was horrified when I told her I had as a roommate for two nights, a very pretty Italian girl. Why, we had a picture of a dago band on our dresser, of which her father was director—and I felt quite cosmopolitan! So my family duly warned me not to put too much faith in strangers just because we happened to be under the same roof. The one I have now seems to be a very tractable young lady, and I can't think that she wants my pocket-book. I admire her because she doesn't tell any more about herself than is absolutely necessary. I meant to do this too, but the first pop out of the box I had aired every skeleton in the family closet.

A night or so after I came, some distant cousins living here took me out to a Mexican restaurant for supper. The coffee was vile, but the waiters were

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

handsome, and there was Mexican music too, "La Paloma" and "La Golan-drina." I couldn't decide which to do—eat or listen. You can't do both conveniently, for Mexican dishes require much attention. For instance, the tamales are wrapped in corn husks, and to remove these daintily is no small task. One of the boys of our company whispered in my ear, "You watch me, Polly, then you won't appear awkward." Under his direction I managed to make neat work of it. Their tortillas are pancakey affairs that anywhere else but in a Mexican cafe would have a slick, unbaked taste. But here we smacked our lips and said with watering mouths, "Ah, tortee—yas!"

Here were people from everywhere—getting a taste of Mexico! Everybody lingered long after eating and enjoyed the candlelight, the music, and one another. They sang "Forgotten," and I can't tell you what a sweet sad-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ness came over me. It was as if I had run away from some true heart, and this song was taking out of me all the bitterness and unrest I had felt before.

San Antonio is just like some fine old Spanish relic. A dear, cool river winds in and out, spanned by attractive little bridges. The sun rises and sets in very surprising places. The streets wind about rather aimlessly too, wherever the river isn't. There are many Mexicans and Spaniards, talking the queerest lot of gibberish you ever heard. Oh, Grimpy, it lights old fires within me and I want to study Spanish, delve into history and know all about architecture—all in a day.

A little grey-haired lady, and I (are you jealous?) took a tourists's ride about the city and out to the Spanish Missions, now almost two centuries old. There are three of them, and oh, so quaint and hoary. I wish I could make you see them as I did. Perhaps the



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

spring-like day had something to do with it. The nunnery stands now with no roof but the blue sky—itsself, a poor skeleton of arches, Roman and Gothic side by side, every line softened by time. The cloister, too, had a particularly beautiful sky line, with lichen growing here and there amid the ruins. Here were these missions crumbling away, and parts of them had never been completed. I felt as if I could fill a pulpit the following Sunday morning and take for my text, "What fools we mortals be!" There was a priest among us, and I had hoped to see him most devout in the presence of these tottering walls; but nothing save the passing show seemed to penetrate his rotund, comfortable self. When we were exclaiming over a very ornate door and window designed and superintended by a sculptor and artificer sent over by the king of Spain, and bewailing the fact that they had been marred by initials, our

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

pudgy priest only chuckled and said, "Boys will be boys, you know!"

It has always seemed deplorable to me that when in the presence of something uplifting—whether a sunset, running water, ruins, a fine face,—when one likes to be still and listen or look—there is ever the clanging of the world outside or some parrot beside you begging you to "come out of it." I suppose we just have to learn to take the dull with the fine and hold to the beautiful anyhow. It is ours to separate them. So here was this noisy, blustery rubber-neck wagon rattling about me while I tried to sum up the afternoon. What had I seen or learned? Then I felt suddenly glad for Today, the bigness of Right-Now built on the ruins and mistakes of yesterday. I quit stewing about the tomorrows and a gentle peace—more delicate than the song of the wind in the grasses—came over me. It was as though someone held me by the hand and was leading me into All Good.

Yours,

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### IX.

Dear Grimpy,—

I do wish I had you here right quick to tell me what kind of a bird this is. He's mostly red. I'm going to call him a cardinal. How he struts in his red coat! You would think he had done great service in the British army.

Your good letter came this morning and lifted me quite out of myself. Perhaps it will do you good to know I was needing you too! I was glad to recall to my travel-weary mind that there are such places as little homes with a charm about them of a "family that belong to each other" there. Theoretically, boarding houses are good for feeding us and administering to our temporal wants, and hotel rooms to house ourselves o' nights; but they would sap the very soul out of a poet himself if he did

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

not take care to defend himself with much reading and a bit of open sky and country now and then.

But, my dear lady, never be so imprudent as to mention whipped cream pie to one who boards!

Do you know—cross my heart, I'm not homesick—I have so long schooled myself against such weakness, but I do yearn for somebody to talk at. There's just my little grey-haired lady at the B. H. that will listen. She is a dear soul who somehow understands your heart. So few people get any farther than the cut of your coat. She is a modiste. I liked this that she said: "I feel reasonably sure that a dressmaker gets nearer folks' skin than anybody."

I eat at the "silentest" table at the B. H. It's absolutely painful the way we munch and say nothing. I think now of how at a certain house party in the country we'd plan not to talk some meal, just for fun! But I beg to

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

"quoth", with the raven, "Nevermore." Anyway, we'd plan to giggle and that wasn't so bad. But here it is surely a serious ceremony. A very much "be-diamonded" doctor bites away a smile now and then. Honestly, if I hold my tongue much longer, I shall become an opinionless, nebulous mass. I now know that we come to definite conclusions and stubborn opinions only by expressing ourselves. Hearing ourselves on the subject, we become convinced of it, but not before.

Once in a while, on "chicken day" when it's crowded, they put me at another table where I become greatly enlightened as to street paving, victrolas and diseases. The two school teachers are the only ones who never mention shop. They dress for dinner every evening, and you would think from their freshness that they had sat the blessed day "on a cushion and sewed a fine seam." The doctor would have us

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

believe that the whole world is full of goiters. It's a very dismal outlook. If you say you haven't any, then there's every reason in the world to believe you have one. In fact that's a sure sign. But he's kind and dear, and they all seem to love him. Really, he's so good I fear as a boy he must have suffered under the name of "Sissy"; but sissy boys, they say, are apt to make excellent husbands.

Serene above us all, shines Mother Norton, the great big-hearted, big-bosomed woman who feeds us. Ah, there's a mother! Not the mother love that limits itself to its own flesh and blood, but the love that mothers everyone who comes in sight. I have seen grown men, tired from work, rest their weary heads a moment on her fat, comfortable shoulder as children hold up their bumped heads to be kissed. She pats them, and scolds them, and misses them

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

when they don't come. "They're nothing but a lot of children," she said to me, as she proudly hustled them all in to dinner. The old man who sits out in the yard, "gol-darns" everything in sight, and spits tobacco juice, is her husband, we are told. "There! that's the reason for her success!" said my little grey-haired lady, "she had to."

So one need never despair if the heart keeps tender, does one, Grimpy? It seems to me that everything of any account in this world harks back to just such simple things as loving and caring. I am coming to believe that if we were pleased to simmer down each piece of man's handiwork to its embryonic state, we should find there under them all, this,—that some big, plain heart wanted to do a kind act.

All these truths that I am growing into, you have known all along I am sure. You wanted me to discover them for myself. That is best.

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### X

Dearest Grimpy,—

I believe a boarding house is the loneliest place in the world. When I see the boarders sitting around, playing their little game of stiffness and pretence which they wear uncomfortably, as a high collar, and know all the time what boy and girl hearts they have and how they are itching to make up, I feel a mad desire to rush in, join their hands together in a circle and say, "Come now, let's ring around a rosy!" There isn't one of them who wouldn't play, I'm sure. But there—convention restrains me and whispers, "What would people say?" Those four words have cowed stouter hearts than mine, and made commonplace folks out of most of us. Don't think I'm rough, Grimpy, for I say it with all reverence



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

—it's really too bad that we "don't give a darn" oftener. We might accidentally do something pleasant and worth while.

The story is told of a very timid girl who learned how to forget herself and radiate a great deal of happiness by approaching all whom she met with the idea that everybody's lonesome. She found herself jabbering away delightedly to the king himself one evening when she met him walking alone in the garden—and who on earth could be more lonesome (outside of a B. H.) than a king, Grimpy? I'll bet he was glad to meet someone who didn't think of his eyebrow as royal, don't you? It must be quite a tonic to His Royalty to be crossed even occasionally by some breezy American who refuses to kiss his hem. I can't think of anything more enervating than to have no one higher than one's self to emulate or admire; for, inside, the king must know

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

what a poor devil in disguise he is! I don't wonder that he snatches off his crown occasionally, hops down from his throne and travels incognito. He wants a good breath of fresh air for once—through unroyal nostrils. He likes to yawn and stretch awhile in citizen's clothes and find out for himself what sort of a man he would make among men. Truly, his poor weary soul must need all the "God save the kings" that were ever uttered for him.

The other day at the B. H., while we were all in a stupid half-doze waiting for dinner, a rather pretty girl with decidedly too much make-up on her face, seeming to sense the real in my little grey-haired lady, turned to her and said, "I believe I'm the unhappiest girl in the world." The little lady looked her straight in the eye for a moment and said, hitting rock bottom of the matter immediately, "What do you want to do?"

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

"I want to sing."

"Then why don't you sing?"

"No one will have me; my voice isn't strong enough."

"Isn't there something else you can do?"

"Oh, yes, I s'pose—but I don't want to do that."

"Then do something you don't want to do, and see how your voice will improve!"

"Will it really?" the girl asked earnestly.

"It can't help it," was the answer.

"Do the thing nearest to your hand and do it well. Keep busy, and everyone will want to hear you sing. It will put a song in your heart, and you've got to have one there before anything worth while will come out of your throat. Begin by mothering those brothers of yours. Darn for them and love them."

The dinner bell rang. "I'm going to try it," she said, seizing the little lady's

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

hand, "but it's sure a queer voice culture. I'm glad I met you!" and she went humming happily in to dinner.

And then, hungry as I was, I took time to come to a grave conclusion. How necessary, after all, it is—just to keep good! It can't be an "off-again-on-again Flannigan" affair either, it seems, but as even as your stitches, dear Grimpy. Now I know when I watch such lives as yours, full of peace and gentleness and friends, that here is success. And it takes only one day of being good and kind to prove what a satisfaction it brings—a busy, unselfish day. Still we lapse again and complain of what a comfortless, old world this is.

It must be this that I love in old women—their peace of mind. They seem to have arrived at something for which the rest of us poor souls are still battling blindly about.

So, Grimpy, I believe I want to be plain and good. I imagine it would be

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

a wonderful time saver. We spend such a lot of time fretting. So tell me how is the very easiest way—by keeping mightily busy?

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XI

San Antonio, Texas.

My Own Grimpy,—

Listen here, did you ever try this? Get up in the morning looking for something nice to happen—actually expecting it and so dead sure of it that you dressed up for it and put on one of your fresh, clean fichus? You try it. It works! Now don't go into it muttering, "Well I'll do it because Polly told me to, but I've got sense enough to know there isn't anything in it!" "You must have faith and you must have hope," Grimpy.

Let me tell you how it came about with me. I might just as well admit it (because this turns out nicely after all!) I was lonely when I went to bed. The last three or four days had not been the full, glad kind that we are en-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

titled to, and I had a sneaking notion that I was to blame. I have quit blaming things awry on Providence or fate. So I began to have a serious little talk with myself. Most of my difficulties I figure out nestled up in bed. The more I thought, the more I knew that something nice was going to happen next day! I was positive of it and went off to sleep like a tired, expectant child with "manana, manana," the Mexican's tomorrow, ringing in my ears. I awoke early in order to get it all in—whatever it was. I put on the little dress that I feel happiest in and waited, just as if I had a definite appointment with someone, and not a doubt in my heart.

While I hummed an old tune in this receptive mood, something seemed to say to me, "Watch for the little things." Presently the maid came and brought me a letter from a dear friend full of pleasant memories—"a handful of heaven"—she called them. It was the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

sort of a letter that one reads limp, and wears in one's blouse till night.

I went down the street on an errand and met a lady wearing a splendid bunch of spring violets. I must have stared, for before I knew it, this perfect stranger was pinning them on me and saying, "Here, dearie, you have these; you love them, I know." I remembered the promises of today and thanked her. I can't tell you the buoyancy of spirit I felt—like a scarlet geranium looks on a gray day.

At dinner I met with smiles and greetings where before I had come and gone without a word. "What had gotten into them all?" I wondered. Coming home, a voice behind me said, "Where're you from?" It was the timid young man who sits at the silent table. "Up north," I said, "where're you from?" "So'm I—let's talk," and without any more ado we sat down in the lawn swing. "You lonesome?" I asked



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

gingerly. "Here—wear some of my violets in your buttonhole." Fingers all thumbs, he put them in his lapel.

"Don't you ever get lonesome—all alone?" he questioned me closely.

"Listen to me," I said evading him, "do you know what you ought to decide about lonesomeness? Why, just what the old farmer decided when he looked for the first time at the giraffe—'there ain't no such animal!'"

He had a nice, big laugh which I think he had never sprung on San Antonio before. By and by he went to work and I went home, and the last thing he called to me was, "there ain't—that's a fact."

When I reached my room, I found a very deaf and partially blind old lady, waiting for me to read to her. Quite unheralded she just seemed to be washed up to my door, because I had been hungry for somebody to do for,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

and forget for a bit there ever was such a child as Polly Dee.

A bit of driftwood the poor old soul was, surely. It was with the kind of a laugh that puts tears in your eyes that I looked her over. She was most incongruous in a young girl's middy blouse, golf gloves, and a stub of an umbrella with which she felt her way around. Before I knew it, I was shouting stories into her ear at the top of my voice and feeling as contented as if she belonged to me. It made me glad for eyes and ears and voice, and that I could use them for somebody else. It was long past my supper time when she asked me where the sun was; so I wrapped her up and took her home myself.

I shan't tell you where she lived—I tried to forget it in the glory of the sunset that I was glad I could see. I now know that people, like sunsets, have their afterglow when they have made a sunny day of it. Again I was

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

on my pillow summing things up. What a day! Frankly, I admitted it wasn't the sort of pleasure I had looked for—sans excitement, sans flattery—but sans self! I had forgotten myself in the letter, the violets, the lonesome lad, the little, old lady and in the evening glow of color.

Perhaps every manana has all of this in it for us, but we have to make a place for it in our hearts first.

Try it, Grumpy, or do you always and is this just another truth in your life that I am finding out?

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XII

San Antonio, Texas.

Grimpy dear,—

I have just come in from the “gallery” where I have been enjoying one of our long twilights, and feel as soothed as if I had my head in your lap and you were stroking my tousled hair. I used to think that the drowsy, insect night-sounds were the stars twinkling, and I still like to think of them as twinkling noisily. It makes them seem so much nearer.

But the stars themselves belong to Celia—a dear girl we learned to love in college. None of us ever thought of claiming them when she discovered their comfort and their message. Just as I go to my pillow to work things out, Celia would go out under her stars. But she is not selfish with them; so every-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

where we go we have Celia's stars watching over us. But they are hers!

Today was like our first warm burst of spring up north. It seemed to me that surely the apple blossoms must be blooming somewhere near. I am trying not to mind a spring without apple blossoms—but it's human nature I guess to long for one's native heath in spring. Now methinks I know the tug in his heart when Browning from Italy wrote,

“Oh, to be in England

Now that April's there,”

and also the longing of a sweet little woman, who sat next to me in the car on one of our fine May mornings last year. “Yes, you have a pretty country,” she said, “but oh, the primroses in England now! If I could only see them growing.”

Today I, from absolute necessity, was driven to a department store for the first time since I arrived. I made

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

short work of my errand, then smiled indulgently, as I watched my feet carry me straight toward the books! I sometimes think maybe I am lacking in feminine fineness, not to linger awhile among the ribbons and laces. So I made myself stop, to feel of a few sheer collars on a counter. But my indifference was so manifest that the clerk didn't even bother with me. After all a collar is only a collar—but books! to handle them is like touching men's souls.

As I wandered about the counter, enjoying the smell of printer's ink and fresh binding, I was reminded of the sweet parting I had with my own collection when I left home. I was trying to choose a few to bring along, and I felt as if they were all alive and were calling out, "Take me! take me!" And would you believe it, they were the limp, ragged volumes worn by much service that I tucked away in my trunk—the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

selfsame ones that had gone to Florida and Colorado with me. I smiled at the motley lot of them. It wasn't the proverbial three, "Aesop's Fables," "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Arabian Nights" that seem to have formed, together with the Bible, the backbone of the self-educated. I'm afraid mine were a more gossipy set, but so human that to me they approach the divine. There was "Cranford," falling to pieces, almost spilling out those beloved genteel ladies in hoop skirts. There were Kenneth Grahame's "Dream Days" and "The Golden Age," filled with tears and smiles of past readings. "Our Lady of the Beeches" came along to ease one's conscience when one has stirred up an unnecessary flirtation; and for more serious moments there were Wagner's "Simple Life," "Emerson's Essays" and Stevenson's "Virginibus Puerisque." I doubt if any of these sit on Elliot's "five

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

foot book shelf," but notwithstanding, I love their dog-eared selves.

But something of the passing show of fashion had penetrated my consciousness, for as I went home I seemed to remember that full taffeta skirts and hats, tipped forward, were the latest, and that spring was coming, when I too should have a new frock or two. And faith I do need them.

Your

POLLY DEE.

I believe if someone should slip up behind me, and call me just "Polly" once more, I should burst into tears of gratitude at the sound of it!

P. D.



# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XIII

San Antonio, Texas.

Dearest Grumpy,—

Bravo! I have a job! Such a sense of well-being it gives me that I "have much ado to know myself." It truly rouses an honorable sensation to have the grime of work upon my hands. I hesitate to wash it off. I am doing library work, milady, rubbing shoulders once more with the two things I love best—books and folks. I like that homely word "folks." It always feels warmer than just "people."

My life now is so much more purposeful and alive. The night before I began, I was so excited I woke up several times and was sure it was time to dress. I made mammoth preparations. You would have thought I was anticipating a fire, the way I had my clothes

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

just ready to drop on to me. I felt almost as if I ought to sleep in my hat to save time. Of course I arrived at the library foolishly early and walked round and round the block, waiting for the janitor to open the doors.

I stamp books much of the day, but now that I am working more or less automatically, I am free to study the people. I find it highly entertaining to connect the person with the book. They are all seeking for that which will rub off their corners, or else give them that which their own lives fail to produce. A very retiring, drab little woman behind thick glasses swallows whole shelves of romance. A forlorn lad, in continual agony from embarrassment and self-consciousness, asked behind his hat for a "book on etikwette." How my heart did go out to him, Grimpy! I wanted so to tell him what a fine fellow he really was, and that I just knew he was going to do

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

something big. I wanted to give him hope and put a dream in his heart. It was all he needed.

Today a very ethereal mother was trying to interest her daughter, Bertha, in Ibsen. From all I could gather I judged that, for her years, Bertha was having an overdose of aesthetic training, and was mentally balking. She looked as if she needed a pair of roller skates under her, and one solid year of play. I purposely didn't find the book her mother wanted for her, and I believe Bertha understood and felt grateful. But I mustn't try to adjust the whole universe, must I, Grimpy? It's too big a job.

A gentleman, a scholarly recluse, I think, who has been dipping into old works of philosophy, asked those of us who were sitting at the desk, if we could point out to him there in the library—a thinker—someone who really thought! You would have supposed

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

that none of us had ever thought a thought. We gave the matter a moment's consideration and then said we didn't believe there was anybody around like that. I had a big notion once to confess to a few brain cells myself in order to find out what he was about to propound.

Then too, there is the dear old man who shakes hands when he comes and goes, and wants to tell me all about what a fine woman his wife is when I am busiest and they are standing five deep about my desk. For his wife, he always asks me to get a book "with noble characters and beautiful language, ma'am—she's that good she won't read no other," while he chuckles with delight over the latest numbers of "Judge" and "Puck."

And so, Grimpy, I wanted you to know how busy and happy I am. For once I feel decidedly in the right pew, something I have long advocated for

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

others—to find one's right place—but which I have made such a miserable failure of finding for myself until now. I know what it is to sing at my work, a blessed state of mind, surely; and I have all the sweet weariness of work well done that the Village Blacksmith had when he lay down, having "earned his night's repose."

A very busy

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XIV

My own Grimpy,—

How would you like for me to write out my line of march? It goes something like this: I awaken at six and allow myself a few delicious moments of knowing that I am warm and snug in bed and that I don't need to get up unless I really choose. The end of my nose tells me that it is chilly outside. Then I make one unpremeditated leap and in two shakes I am wondering why the bed should have felt so good on such a fine morning. I build a fire. I am the proud owner of a wood-pile, Grimpy, and I feel so primitive that I sometimes wish I had to strike my fire from flint—so I could have the pleasure of hobnobbing with the elements first hand. The delight that we as youngsters were wont to derive from

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

a handful of matches sneaked out of the kitchen, and from the gorgeous red-tongued fire soon after, down the alley—all comes back to me as I persuade my little hot blast to draw and burn.

I find, Grimpy, that it pays to take a little time to pray,—not a begging prayer—but just putting the day into bigger and better Hands than mine. When I do this with the absolute trust of a child, the very air cooling my face as I start out seems an answer to my prayer and assures me that the rough places are going to be made smooth, and the crooked paths straight. And Grimpy, when I do this honestly, and don't stew about how in the world the Lord is ever going to untangle some complication that I foresee, the day just unfolds like a ribbon. I can't understand how I have lived these many years and never realized before how dependable God is! It takes such a load of responsibility off one's shoulders.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I eat a perfectly enormous breakfast to last me through the day, as I don't try to go out to lunch. I am thinking that a camel's hump for stowing provender would be a very useful organ to own. The early morning is full of tonic and it's great to be tearing down to work along with everybody else. The first half hour I do little but "mosey" around among the books, fondling old loves of mine. Here were some dear little books that I first came across up in our tower library at college. I could see again the ivy stirring at the edge of the windows and again experience the drowsy feeling of half dreams that one feels only in school, as I turned them over.

Thus the half hour puts me in tune with the place and at nine o'clock I sit down to my work in earnest. I'm a great deal more apt then to love the lean little "orphant" girl, who comes in and asks hungrily for "Polly Anny



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Growed Up." I know better what to give the sixteen-year-old who wants a "real good love story." I can easier handle the lady of fuss and feathers who asks, impatiently tapping her toe, if she is obliged to stand and wait until all these Mexican children are waited on! It's with a bit of ghoulish glee that I place her in line, surrounded fore and aft by these black-headed youngsters with their dusky faces, and feel as if I shall burst out singing "America" any minute. I find myself, perhaps, the least bit partial to the dear tottery old men and the little boys standing on tiptoe, reaching for knowledge. But oh, Grumpy, I did make one grievous mistake. At the very busiest time of my day, when my beloved Public was standing en masse around my desk, someone asked me to please select a cheery book for an invalid. I sought the shelves hurriedly, but all my friends of the morning seemed to have

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

hidden themselves. Nothing seemed to suit for one sick abed. Finally, desperate for time, I shut my eyes and picked one up at random. But alas! it was one of those acts over which one must repent at leisure. My first bit of spare time I read the card of the book and found I had sent her "The Groanings of the Eternally Damned!" It sounds as if Cotton Mather might have written it. I didn't look to see.

At night I come home bear-hungry, with a pleasant sense of weariness that comes only from work well done. So you see, Grimpy, how full my days are, and how there is no room for thoughts of Polly Dee. Why, I fear if she, through haste or excitement should burst a button, there would be no convenient season for sewing it on.

Yours in harness,

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XV

Grimpy Lady,—

Did you ever have a day start out sort o' pouty—understand the day was pouty, not I—and have it sulk along for hours and then suddenly in the cool of the late afternoon have a rapid fire of good things come pell-mell upon you out of a clear sky and not room enough to squeeze them all in? Such a day was today. I am a firm believer that every day has something to offer, else the Lord wouldn't let us waste twenty-four good hours on it.

The morning was rather colorless in both its details and routine, and I took this, my afternoon off, for shopping. I decided upon this, not out of choice, but from a grim sense of duty and from a feeling that clothes were, after all, a necessary evil which must receive

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

some attention every so often. But it was a most disheartening ordeal. I wouldn't mind trying on hats and dresses if I were beautiful. Indeed I believe I should then give my whole attention to adornment. So perhaps a pretty face would have entirely unfitted me for life. I tried to use the thought that "pretty is as pretty does," but it seems to have the ring of a tinkling cymbal when one is trying to look well in the new shapes. While it is still cool, and spring nowhere in sight, I like to take the attitude of the lilies of the field, and not bother about raiment. But when the warm days come on suddenly, and everyone flowers out in fresh bonnets and frocks, I, still in my velvet hat and fur collar, begin to wonder why I too haven't something fresh and cool. This sense of preparedness in women is quite beyond my ken. I dragged wearily in and out of several stores and had some impossible creations laid away for

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

me for consideration. It's the only way I know of untangling myself from a persistent clerk without a scene.

Then the day began to smile as I listened to a splendid lecture on Stevenson at Beethoven Hall. I was lifted clear out of myself—and hats. He said, Grimpy, that, best of all, Stevenson was a perfect example of being entirely brave—which after all is the easiest way to live—and that he made people see the fun of living and working. I went home to supper with a tingling to write—to work. My head was in the clouds, and already a story was busying itself in my brain. After supper some friends rolled up to take me for an auto ride through a splendid park, over rustic bridges, past the sunset and home again to find three good letters for a final surprise. I found myself wriggling out of my wraps and whistling a late tune I didn't even know I knew.

I don't know what I should do with-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

out letters. They are my family that I come home to o'nights. It's quite a lottery—wondering who will be there waiting in envelopes when I turn on the light. Before I open my door, I line myself up mentally in some such guise as this: "Who's looking for a letter? Why I just had two last night—so there can't be any tonight,"—but I do a lot of feeling and hunting in spite of it. And Grimpy, it is wonderfully restful at the close of a day to open a letter and there be told that you have been a help to someone, and that they need you now to help lift over the ugly places. I would rather be told that than to look handsome in all the hats in the world!

One,

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XVI

Carnegie, Library,  
San Antonio, Texas.

Grimpy, my dear,—

Now that my feet are firmly planted in my new work and I have put my hand to the plough, all sorts of little devils are busy, trying to get me to look back—and come back! But you know what happened to Lot's wife, don't you? I'm not one bit afraid of them so long as I continue to recognize them just for what they are—as little devils. They only amuse me. It's when they disguise themselves as something good that I must have a care.

Some arrive in the form of letters telling how the bunch are to re-une in June at college commencement, and from old school friends, telling me I must not fail them. Letters from home

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

assure me that the weather is splendid now with hints of apple blossoms. David, the baby, is growing out of all recognition; John can say everything and is about to forget who Polly is. I had better come home. Then there are the spring devils, which call loud and long with running water and bird songs, and beckon with new, clean leaves, and wave fleecy clouds at me through the windows. They bid me only smell the perfume in the air, and whisper in both my ears at once, "Why work when all the world outside's a-playing?"

But I have only to look my beloved Public in the face and see them smile to find me at my desk, to know that my place is serving them. When I remember the idle days before, I know that here is my joy. I wouldn't wonder either if a fluffy cloud glimpsed by me at a busy moment through an open window, hasn't more spring in it than a whole lazy day under open skies.



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Spring is coming for sure, Grimpy. We don't say this out loud, but we nudge one another and point to the new green all around. It's that old fear I guess that it'll "turn in and snow agin;" and then Spring is such a timid creature. But one day soon we shall notice suddenly that we can't see down the street as in winter and we can shout and sing, "The spring is here!" Then I shall begin planning a pink dress and a garden hat. Fantastic creations—both of them, that I can't begin to make the dressmaker and milliner understand, or else they'll say they're too impractical. I'd like to have one dress for once that was apt to fade, wouldn't wash, and that actually fit me at the time it was made, with no allowance for shrinkage on its part or growth on mine.

Come to remember, I did have one once, and it was a real joy. It was when I was away at school. I found

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

a good-natured little seamstress who agreed to let me have my way about everything. I revelled in the prospect of this dress and planned how I would keep it always laid away in lavender to hand down to my great grandchildren. It was really a glorified affair, Grimpy, though my own family might tell you differently. I didn't get it out of any fashion book but just conjured it up from impressions I gathered from the dress of ladies I loved in books. It was pink of course, and delightfully low in the neck,—not made with any thought of rheumatism or pneumonia. The skirt was almost covered with point de sprit ruffles until positively it looked good enough to eat. It was for one of the big spring parties and I could scarcely wait to wear it. Ellen in the next room was invited too, and was making over her last year's party dress at odd moments. One night I couldn't sleep, so just to amuse myself

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I pulled out my pink darling and slipped it on over my gown. Then I heard someone coming and how I dreaded to be caught garbed thus in the dead of night. Suddenly the door opened and there stood Ellen dressed in her party dress too! How we did giggle and tip-toe about! In the daytime we had assumed with one another an absolute indifference about the party, but now we were forced to confess it was our all absorbing thought. I should like to have one more pink dress which would give me half the thrills that the frills of that one did.

O, Grimpy, the spring, the spring! If you don't do anything more, get a spade and turn up a bit of earth and smell the freshness of it!

All aglow,

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XVII

Dear Grimpy,—

I am just at this moment deliberately doing a very pleasant thing. I think we do so more seldom than we should. We allow duty to keep us whipped into line along ugly paths. It is only when we reason in a paradox, that it is our duty to forsake duty, that we ever get out and play. It is my noon time and I am down on the banks of the river idling. A truly lovable idler never apologizes. I, with two other little truants, am throwing pebbles into the water and forgetting time. I can't see that they are getting any particular joy out of the quiet of this spot—except just this—that they ought to be at school. It's a grand dare—every boy does it at least once in his life. Unfortunately there is no circus in town, so

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

they have haunted the river. Bless them! I can tell from their freckled frowns that they are wondering what the deuce there is to do—just the two of them—except not to go back to school, and they can't go home!

"Ain't we havin' a good time?" asked one, sounding his comrade in sin.

"If there was anything to do, gee whiz," said the other disgustedly. Ah, a funny business this, playing hooky—enjoyed, I'm thinking, more in anticipation and in retrospect than at the actual hooky-time. It's only the genuinely good pleasures that we can ever enjoy in the Now of time. Thus I philosophized.

Two Mexicans, kings of their consciences, are asleep under their hats on the opposite shore. I wish I were Bohemian enough to lie down comfortably in the weeds without a fear of getting insects in my hair and down my collar.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Just across the stream there is a noisy little falls that makes one long to pull off shoes and stockings and wade. The spirit of all running water to me will forever be the spirit of Leonora—a splendid girl I came upon in Colorado. Water was her fascination, her weakness—her element; running waters made her positively reverent. I would rather hear her talk of cold, clear mountain streams than to see them myself.

I am about to make a suggestion to the mayor. I am thinking what a possible and yet splendid scheme—to be wafted home in a gondola! Here is the river running just back of the library and each evening I could drift coolly down to my boarding house. I would suggest that he replace jitneys with gondolas.

Jitneys have quite taken the town, and they do have their advantages. But to hail one at night is weary busi-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ness. You are supposed to distinguish them by the tiny lights in their tops which you can never see until it's too late—just to let you know you have missed one. One night two of us were in a fearful hurry to get down town, and there was nothing to do but stand in the middle of the street and hail everything with headlights. Finally by standing square in the way we managed to bring to a halt what we believed to be a jitney. But no! A very good looking gentleman tipped his hat and said "Is there anything I can do for you, young ladies?" "Oh no, sir," I said frantically, "but please go on!" He smiled, tipped his hat and again drove off. I wonder if men feel as kindly as custom bids them act.

Yesterday afternoon some friends took me for a spin through the park to the Zoo to see a baby monkey. He had such a funny little old-man face, and his mother seemed almost human in

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

her care of him. The park was full of song birds and wild verbenas, and by and by we passed a crowd of saucy-faced pansies. Sis says they look like little old sailors to-her. I should rather have descended from a pansy than a monkey.

We pine for rain and try to coax it by lugging our raincoats about under perfectly clear skies. I suppose this is the fault of the war. Everything is. The proverbial "old woman" says it rains with less judgment in Texas than any place she ever saw.

Idling,

POLLY DEE.



# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XVIII

Carnegie Library,  
San Antonio, Texas.

Grimpy Dear,—

This library is the most cosmopolitan place you can imagine—a regular free-for-all. Nobody seems to be bothered with lack of concentration. The school children shout with laughter in the corridors. Youngsters in petticoats make a turning pole out of the iron railing that runs in front of the receiving desk, while their mothers are deep in books. Tramps have a liking for taking a snooze in a peculiarly breezy corner back among the stacks. Yesterday a feeble old man, who I had supposed was a minister, superannuated, judging from his manner and his green-back Prince Albert, drew his knife on the man next to him, for no apparent rea-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

son whatever, and Carter, our janitor, had to separate them.

In the afternoon Vanity Fair goes past on its way to the Art Exhibit, which is held in our auditorium. So all the fifty-seven varieties go to make up my public.

I have been only twice to see the pictures and would go oftener only when I go, I have that bull-in-a-china-shop feeling. One wouldn't mind the sensation much, but for the horror that someone else will find it out. My ignorance about art is appalling. I seem to enjoy most the bright patches—combinations of purples and greens, and rare reds and browns. I don't tell this at the Exhibit—in fact I don't trust myself to say much of anything around pictures and in the midst of artists. It isn't that I want to like what many others like, but I want to know why I like what I like. I watched a gentleman—evidently quite a connoisseur of art—

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

standing by the half hour in front of one picture, never moving his eyes away from it. I had finished with the same picture in a moment — trees, moonlight, “study in blues and grays” — was the way I summed it up. What did he see that I had missed, and why did he go back again and again and gaze some more? It must be splendid to get an afternoon’s joy out of the curve of a bough. There’s something else to learn. How they keep piling up and up, Grimpy!

While I was in there, fifty nudging, giggling, fighting, tickling school children came bursting in, brought down by their teacher with the hope of creating in them a sense of the beautiful. I wanted to get in line and learn with them, but I soon found that they were about as hopeless as I. Their particular joy was a plaster soldier whose frail gun they delighted in bending as far as possible without breaking. After

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

rescuing this bit of statuary, the poor teacher had to pull down by the heels a young imp who had climbed up and left his finger prints upon a frame which the artist had carefully tinted to blend with his landscape. It was with a lump in her heart, I am sure, that she soon took her swarm back to school.

Because I have been making a study recently of Irving in the "Alhambra," a picture of a castle pleased me most. I think it's just as well that we've never really been inside a castle, Grimpy. To actually see in cold stone what you have read and dreamed about all your life is to take away the castle itself. The real beauty and charm of the castle is the longing to go there, and Lowell says:

"The thing we long for, that we are  
For one transcendent moment."

But we seem to have so few untarnished wishes. I am able to count on

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS .

my big toes the times when I, under the impulse of the moment, did the big thing before I had time to think it over—and change my mind. Once was in the mountains last summer at Blue Jay Inn, a holiday house for girls. At the breakfast table Evelyn, across from us, looked sad. She had to leave that morning to go back to work with only one week of the mountains and rest. We all knew her history—alone in the world, handicapped with deafness—a rather sad outlook. As if with one mind, Maude, the dear, impulsive girl next to me, and I looked at one another and said “Let’s!” Maude was cleaning lamps to reduce expenses and I hadn’t earned a cent for a year. But we knew it was right. It would come. With some birthday money I had received the day before, and some left-over Xmas money to help out, I was able to make the gift my own little sacrifice, and together we kept her another

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

week. It wasn't hard to tell who were the happier. We fairly glistened with joy! I never felt so good in all my life. Maude came tearing into my room after we had made all arrangements with the House Mother and with Evelyn's employer in Denver by telephone.

"That's positively the first time I ever did anything without wondering what I was going to get out of it," she said, beaming. I think we each wore a halo of delight about our heads. But alas! perhaps we may have become too conscious of them, and they faded away. But the lesson was deep in our hearts and I turned reverently to God as the real "Giver of every good and perfect gift."

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XIX

San Antonio, Texas.

My Lady,—

These spring mornings of new leaves, I always feel when I open the door as if something very lovely had quietly happened in the night. Does one ever get so old, Grimpy, think you, that the spring fails to surprise again? To me it always seems like a brand new arrangement, a panorama staged for the first time. Of course, I have gathered wild flowers before, and remember as a youngster, bothering Mother, to let me take off heavy underwear or get out my sunbonnet and go barefooted, but I never seem to have smelt or felt such a spring as this.

I am glad we have seasons here—it isn't exactly good for one's soul to surfeit with evergreen all the year round. To see a bare, unpromising bough

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

slowly put forth its leafy loveliness renews the hope in us that some day we will get to do all the things we have long wanted to do. 'Tis my faith, Grimpy, that every truly good wish that burns in our hearts is a promise of its ultimate fulfillment.

Spring makes us reminiscent, and it's always back to school that I go in memory. Such a glad, glad time when our will "was the wind's will, and the thoughts of youth were long, long thoughts." I am glad now that Julia and I cut services that Sunday morning, and, in old clothes, with baskets on our arms crawled out the back parlor window and worshipped with the violets. I think I never felt so devout and peaceful as in the hush of that woods. I felt a blessed sincerity taking hold of my consciousness and the peace that always follows being true. Never had violets grown so tall, and when we pulled in for din-



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ner, laden with great bunches of these purple patches, I was sure I had caught a glimpse of God that day.

There were two beloved sentimental creatures at our college whose "case" broke out worse than ever in the spring. She told me in confidence that no two had ever loved as they loved and I professed to believe it. I was glad they didn't know any better. They were planning to marry of course, to build a home, to travel, to have a garden and to read books. I might come to visit them occasionally, if I liked, and see how happy they were. Some of the fellows, knowing their state of mind, had a host of bungalow catalogs sent to them—splendid offers in furniture—the sort that comes in strips, and by a very little fitting and manipulation, you can put it together. Presto! a chair, a table, a dresser—anything! The Boy and Girl simply devoured these books. They cut chapel to read

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

them and carried them to the woods on Sundays and holidays. They built a new home every day. The fireplace was always given first consideration. All the rest was built around it. I loved to hear them talk and encouraged them. Some said they were wasting a lot of time and that they'd find out to their sorrow that life was a stern reality. But Grimpy, the Girl believed in him; she knew he could and he did. I heard from them last week. They have their home and garden, their books and a delightful journey now and then. The fellows looking on are amazed and call it a streak of luck. Grimpy, it pays to dream,—not about something that is likely to happen soon, but about the lovely impossible that quite often materializes if one will but dream and hold on! But Grimpy, we must be sure we are right. Sometimes I feel almost discouraged when every problem resolves itself into a grim ne-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

cessity of keeping good. Some do say,  
however, that it's very easy to do. Well,  
yes—at times!

Trying to,

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XX

San Antonio, Texas.

Dearest Grimpy,—

We are jam full of soldiers! There is scarcely room for us civilians on the sidewalks. Society women are playing at bandaging imaginary wounds, and dabbling in "first aids" under the direction of Mrs. General Funston. The store windows are full of army supplies. All the young girls in town have joined the Red Cross Society, and a Nurses' Training Camp has been organized near here. A convalescent soldier can do very well with an amateur nurse, but a badly wounded one longs for good, stout capable hands—and perhaps less attention. It is said that over the bed of one of the soldiers was found this notice: "Too sick to be nursed today."

Refugees from Mexico are pouring in by trainfuls. Men and women of the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

first families are selling their valuables for bread. One of our girls bought a quaint heirloom—a ruby and diamond ring for only seven dollars in a pawn shop. An attractive little woman whose fortune has been demolished by the upheavals across the border comes to the library every day to read—to forget her troubles. I know she is wealthy by her dog—one of those sticky little Airdale affairs, whose only redeeming quality seems to be that it cost a hundred dollars or so.

An extra police force patrolled the city the first night the troops had been ordered here. Thus far, though, all is quiet along the San Antonio river. The Army Post is filled with five thousand boys, delighted with the fate that turned them loose from their final examinations in school for the joys of camp life.

As they marched through the town after dark, singing the Tipperary song that has lightened so many soldiers'

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

steps and hearts, I felt my spinal column give one of its peculiarly patriotic quivers. Just then I was having the sweet pleasure of putting the little four-year-old boy across the hall to bed.

"It's the soldiers, Bubba," I cried, shaking the sand out of his eyes. Dropping his nightie over his head, I carried him out on our upper gallery. Bubba and my spine were simply unmanageable. It was so impressive to see the lads singing and marching and unafraid. Not another soul seemed to have rushed to greet them.

"Clap, Bubba!" I shouted in the dark—"we must clap and cheer. They're our boys." We clapped long and loud, this baby and I, and hurrahed until they looked up and found us huddled together in the moonlight. Off came their hats and we cheered one another out of sight. I thought Bubba never would go to sleep that night. Even in his slumbers his little mother heard him

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

say: "Clap, Polly! They're our boys."

That night I dreamed a dream. I thought I saw Peter in khaki, head and shoulders above them all. There was that seriousness in his face that I have liked, even when I tried to convince myself that I didn't like him. I thought he was not going to speak, and a great sense of bitterness welled up in me, all the more bitter because I knew I deserved it. With youth's mad delight in passing lightly over that which is steady and true and deep, I had run away from Peter. Just then he looked up, smiled, and marched on.

I was glad to wake up, Grimpy. I am beginning to find that we can't run away from heartaches. It is a terrible thought—that we are some day going to get all we deserve! Besides, it is next to impossible for two people to fall in love simultaneously. Hearts don't work that way. Perhaps you don't understand this, but never mind. I do.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Grimpy, there wouldn't be any misunderstandings and war, if we were all as lovable as you!

POLLY DEE.



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXI

O Grimpy!—

Tonight such a sweet assurance came to me. I was getting ready for bed and reading my “cooling psalm” (the twenty-third) with which I like to close the day. I was trying to know whether or not I really did, down deep in my heart “fear no evil.” Did I always trust that much? As I brushed out my hair I determined to begin right then—to try.

“To fear no evil!” All—everywhere—must certainly be in tune. Then I would find the harmony our hearts cry out for. Presently the sweetest, surest sense of rest came upon me, and as if with the thought itself, there was music outside—as soft as the night air! I didn’t want to think it “just happened.” Nothing ever does. It was simply this—I was in tune, and then I heard

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

the harmony. In a twinkling, like a school girl, I was in my kimona, and out on my "gallery"—doubled up in a big chair in a dark corner—listening. It brought back the nights at college when we listened to the lads under our windows and foolishly thought the moon up above had something to do with the state of our hearts. I was glad tonight that I had outgrown the mental unrest of those years. Those were pagan days when every tree and evening wind had its god, but I had none! Tonight I knew a very gentle and tender Presence which had always been waiting for me.

"I will fear no evil." The music seemed to have called the stars out as well as the people. "Who would have thought," I sighed contentedly to the starry dipper above me, "that you would have found me, this year, this night, under southern skies listening to a real Mexican serenade—"La Golan-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

drina"—and best of all "fearing no evil?" There were a flute and violin, a guitar, a viol and other lovely mellow-toned instruments. I could see they were Mexicans as they lit their cigarettes. Lights went out here and there in the houses and people stirred quietly on their galleries. No applause nor loud talking—we were as quiet as the stars. Just the delight of a child clapping her hands and asking them to please play "A long, long way to Tipperary" and as their notes died away, her wail to her mother "Why must they go home?"

I sat still for a long, long time. The night seemed to have taken up the serenade and was thrumming of other lovely nights: summer nights when I had played my violin for father out on our front porch at home and contentment seemed very near; spring lilac nights at school on the way home from the woods when we as boys and girls

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

clambered wearily over the stile and lapsed into a sweet silence with the evening, and each knew that the world was going to be very kind to him.

And tonight! The darkness seemed made to think in. All seemed so quiet and easy and simple. All the tangles were combed out of everything! I felt as rested as if I had slept a night and was eager to try the day again.

It was not strange at all that I thought of Peter. Perhaps I had done wrong. He was a man's man,—the sort that does things with his hands, "nor dreams about them all day long." His big plain heart had reflected the evening glow, the gladness of bird songs, the fall of summer rains, though he never put them into words. Instead he put them into life. I could see now where I had been the fool, and Peter had been spared such a mistake. Again I turned my eyes to the stars and whispered, "Heaven help Peter, not me, and make him happy."

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Grimpy, does the night smooth out  
for you the wrinkles of the day, just  
as it does for

POLLY DEE?

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXII

Grimpy, my dear,—

Sis writes that Neighborhood has had a party and that our family mixed genially with the family whose boys stole our cherries and roses last summer. Such parties are great pacifiers. In evening dress, Neighborhood assumes a gentle graciousness which blots out of memory past differences as so many ugly dreams.

I dislike to miss one of these community parties. We don't do anything particularly—just sit and talk and laugh and eat—but there is such a satisfaction in moving among people who already like you anyway, even if they do know you. There isn't one of us that can sing or play or do much of anything "accomplished;" still we know each other clear to our back doors, and what we don't know we find out at the parties.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I am playing London Bridge with myself, and the question is this: which would I rather—be at home for that party with house-cleaning time near at hand, or down here? That settles it. Now I know why spring looks so lovely to me this year. The awful millstone of house-cleaning isn't hanging about its neck.

As children, this grand upheaval was delightful and there was always a chance of sleeping one night on a pallet. An old dusty carpet on the clothes line had splendid possibilities of being turned into almost anything our imaginations chose to hit upon. Those were the days when we were young and godless and knew not a germ. Pictures and mirrors out in the yard looked strange and unfamiliar. Mother's red velvet wedding bonnet and aunt Kate's second-day taffeta with a fringed bertha were aired once more, and occasionally a story or two went along with them.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Our fascination in the glum painters and paper hangers and in their pipes and lunches was something intense. Yes, I can think of some bright spots in this renovation even if it did necessitate a very tired mother and a father out of sorts. Men hate to have their papers and traps disturbed into any sort of order. Bud kept his room positively unsanitary in its untidiness. His motto was: "A thing for every place and every place with its thing." Once a year, however, we took the liberty of dumping the whole works out of the window and having a roaring bonfire down the alley, without consulting him.

One happy time during the turmoil was when we got down all the old-fashioned dishes of grandmother's from the top shelves to wash them. The lovely tall glass cake stand recalled splendid iced cakes of past birthdays, with our names, ages and other important statistics done in red drops on the top.



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

It grieved us that it was no longer hygienic to keep such a stand full of cake sitting on the table, as we used to find it at Grandmother Dee's. Folks must have been happy then. There were stemmed jelly glasses, high spoon holders and goblets—and we dabbled in them all morning, making a faint pretense of washing them. What a joy to eat when the syrup poured out of a bird's bill, and the gravy flowed in an exact reproduction of the Mississippi river worked out in some magic way on the steak plate belonging to our great grandmother Pierson. How could people content themselves, we wondered, with only gold bands when they might have all fairyland along with their bread and meat?

The dusting and re-sorting of the family pictures always served to restore a certain amount of harmony. Father waxed jovial once more as he hunted his old sweethearts in the album

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

and winked at us as Mother grew painfully jealous. In retaliation she pointed out the pictures of the little Jew who sent her tube roses at boarding school, and the man who gave her a riding whip and who has remained single to this very day. Then it was never long until they told how they met—our Father and Mother—at the old normal school, how they botanized together and how they were both very, very sure from the first that they were for each other. And Mother whispered that if Sis and I ever found anybody as good and kind as our Father, then we might marry, though she didn't believe there were any such and neither did we. We would always belong to Father. That seemed all-sufficient and very good indeed.

It's too bad, Grimpy, that we ever allow ourselves to grow up where we cease to make a game of every task. The people who work the hardest and

## **THE GRIMPY LETTERS**

endure the best, I've found, are those  
who have learned always to find play  
in their work.

**POLLY DEE.**

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XXIII

Carnegie Library,  
San Antonio, Texas.

Dear Grimpy,—

Little, red-headed, freckled-faced, Katie O'Brien seems to be known to everyone. "That is Katie O'Brien," I heard several ladies say as this little Irish girl in blue calico entered the library. Katie for all her plainness did have an air of having stirred up recognition. So I asked them for Katie's story. Here it is—a plain unvarnished tale.

Katie's class at school was to have a picnic, and a May Queen must be chosen. The teacher announced that they would vote. Katie quickly threw up her hand. "Kinna vote for maself?" she asked eagerly.

"If you like," the teacher said, suppressing a smile. The votes were cast

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

and counted by marks on the board.

The May Queen turned out to be a very fair-haired, ethereal little girl in a white apron and a big pink bow on her hair. Katie received one vote. Her head dropped to her desk and bubbling sobs were audible all over the hushed room. The May Queen stirred uneasily.

"What is the matter, Katie?" the teacher said, patting her gently on the head.

"I—wanted—to be—the queen," came from the desk in broken words.

"But we can't all be queens, Katie," the teacher explained.

After a time Katie looked up with a very damp face. "I know, but I ain't never been nobody, and I want to be somebody!"

This was no time for mending English grammar. "Why yes, dear, you are a bright little girl—isn't it something to be Katie O'Brien?"

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

"But I never did get to wear a crown or wings or even carry a banner." It was plain that Katie was ambitious.

In the back of the room the big, bad boy was touched. Swinging his muddy boots out noisily into the aisle, he muttered: "Aw, Katie, ef I'd a-know'd it, I'd a-voted fer you. I didn't 'spose you'd want to be queen."

This was small comfort to Katie, for again the wail broke out afresh—"I ain't never been nobody, and I want to be somebody!" So they made her the queen's attendant, gowned her in tarlatan and for one glad day Katie was somebody!

After I heard her story, I wanted to talk to Katie. I was anxious to know if she still sought the glamour of the limelight.

"Aren't you Katie O'Brien?" I asked as I took the book she handed me, "and didn't you play attendant to the Queen on May Day?"

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Her blue eyes shone for a moment then dulled again. "Yessum," she said, "just for one day."

"It must have been very wonderful to attend the queen," I said.

"No'm," she answered, frankly. "You see it was just Lucy Allerdice—not a real, real queen!"

"So it wasn't so much fun after all?" I asked.

"No'm. I was even funnier lookin' than ever in all them togs. But I'm reading "Polly Anna." She played a game and I've got one too."

"What?" I asked eagerly.

"Why—I'm going to be the nicest, red-headed, freckled-faced little girl in the world. My mother told me I could."

Every freckle fairly sang! I kissed her on the biggest one. "You are, right now!" I said with a hug.

And from the look in her eyes I believe Katie O'Brien then and there

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

knew what it was to have wings and a crown.

What splendid hearts we often find,  
Grimpy, beating heroically under blue  
calico!

POLLY DEE.



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXIV

Dearest Grimpy,—

It was this way. I had been wanting some roses. They seemed to be everywhere in abundance, and there was a splendid bunch of them just outside my door, which had been brought to the family, with whom I live. Somehow though, I wanted some of my own to arrange them and care for them and give them a fresh drink every day. When I went out that morning I stuck my nose down among them, as much to feel their soft faces as to smell them. As I did this something splashed—just one little drop. I insisted it was the dew. They declared it was a tear. If they were only mine, I should wear some on my old coat. It would help a heap. Just then something in the heart of those flowers said as low—"Keep lovin' and you'll have some too." "Well,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ain't I?" a little imp spoke for me. With roses as plentiful as water, it looked as if some few might belong to me. All day long I heard "Keep lovin'," and heard it most when I least wanted to hear it. "One gets tired of loving promiscuously," I retorted mentally.

Toward evening with my head bowed over my work, I felt someone near my desk. I looked up to find a dear old Scotch gentleman holding out to me a huge bouquet of—roses!—and bowing very formally. I felt like a real lady of old.

"Will you accept these from my garden?" he asked.

I'm afraid I grabbed them, Grumpy. "Oh" I said, "Who told you? I've been wishing and wishing for some of them." Then there was another drop, dew or tear—no matter!

"Here, smell this one," he said simply.

I arranged them lovingly and thoughtfully in a vase, trying them this

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

way and that. "Wasn't it in 'Amos Judd' that someone called someone else 'The Spirit of Old Fashioned Roses?'" That was all I could remember, but it had always seemed very beautiful to me. "Some day we men and women will be as pure and lovely as you are—if we keep trying," I said as I loosened them. The old gentleman didn't understand my jabbering and had gone off to hunt a book. "How sure, roses, you seem of your own loveliness. Must we too? Tell me what you know—what is deep within you and me?"

Have you never seen little children suddenly look up from their bowls of bread and milk with eyes as blue as their bowls, Grimpy, and ask, as out of a clear sky, "Mother, what is God?" Sometimes I think the child knows, but his foolish, fearful mother silences him and the visionary gleam is gone.

For one brief moment I felt like one of these children, and that I was very

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

near some great truth. But it was only for an instant and then I was back at my work again. The flowers were very beautiful—still I kept feeling that somehow they weren't as complete a joy as I had expected to find them. "Why must every blessing have a shade of disappointment?" I sighed, actually weary of the incompleteness of things. It must have been breathed as a prayer for the answer came. There was one thing lacking, and that was the fun of carrying them to someone else. It was a bit hard to give them up so soon. However, I was obedient and carried them home to a little lonesome girl who eats at my table and is passionately fond of flowers. When I saw her smile as I placed them in her arms, I was satisfied. I knew then the full pleasure of flowers: they must be given away.

Somehow I think it must be the same with hearts. It wouldn't be half bad to

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

be tucked away on Peter's farm tonight listening to the night calls. I was to have a pleasant, southwest room, lined with books and windows, looking out over his old-fashioned garden. Now that it is never to be, why does it keep bobbing up before me in such romantic guise? I try to remind myself of the inconveniences,—the milk pails, and the hungry men to be fed three times a day; but over and above this comes the remembrance of a true heart that surpasses all else.

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XXV

Carnegie Library,  
San Antonio, Texas.

Dear Grimpy,—

To one who has gone through an honest day's work, nothing is quite so acceptable as quiet and a kimona. I am growing more and more pleased with my own company. Someway we just suit—"me and myself." When I want to read or hum or eat an apple or take a bath, so does she. I mustn't encourage this too much, for I should dislike mightily to become so wedded to solitude that I would snap at people when they came near. I am trusting to my busy days to ward that off. Surely though, one does owe a bit of one's life to one's self.

For this reason, Grimpy, I am persuaded never to marry. Not that there's any particular rush about mak-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ing up my mind, or someone standing at the front door waiting to know how I feel about it. I just decided it anyway all by myself and I feel so settled down and comfortable since. I have seen too many splendid lives frittered away waiting for some man to come along to make things pleasant and agreeable. Then sometimes I have seen him come and he didn't make much improvement in matters. He didn't bring the Blue Bird of Happiness with him, and the little romantic woman finding this out, begins very late to mend her view of life and work out her own salvation.

It's really astonishing to me how I've changed my notion about such weighty matters as falling in love in the last few months. Time was when I scorned the woman who declared it was all tomfoolery. I, for one, would cling to romance till I wore shoulder shawls and night caps. I absorbed the Portuguese

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Sonnets in the spring and mentally married off everyone. I thrived on weddings. We drove much in May and built our houses a hundred ways as the different farm houses appealed to us. We covered them with ivy. We hid them with beeches and Lombardy poplars. We chose to move them back from the road. We planted gardens round them—of bright red hollyhocks, sweet peas, crimson ramblers and heliotrope. Coming home our imaginations would subside a little, and we would begin to get hungry—bear hungry! Vegetable gardens and fruit trees seemed more to the point, and our humble cottages smelled deliciously of boiled cabbage and onions!

No! tonight I wouldn't have a man presented to me on a silver platter. My life is so full I don't seem to have any time for him. It is truly a wonderful thing to belong to one's self. I hope I shall never in a rash moment forget



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

this. I find it is policy not to mention this openly, for in this age one is accounted heretic who does not endorse marriage heartily, whether he indulges in it or not. There are too many toes out to be stepped on in a matter of this sort.

The weariest, most fagged-out people in the world are those who are working hard at a good time,—wearied chiefly because their efforts are so futile—they never find it. What is a good time after all, but being good? It's the very easiest way in the world. A girl in speaking of her present chum said to me: "I'm tired of gadding. But I will say this for Clara,—she's the least strain on me of any chum I ever had!" So it would seem that there are heavy obligations even in chumship. They ought to be nice comfortable ones as we are, Grimpy, each going his own way and yet dead sure down deep in our hearts that we are chumming.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

My evenings put the finishing touches on my days. They are so uneventful that they hardly bear describing. There is a gulf breeze which rises about seven and fans away the fever of the day. I enjoy the fresh cold water on my face and the sight of the letter that waits to be opened. My room is a very plain little affair—very crude as to tables and chairs, but the idea of “home” upholsters it splendidly and dresses it in elegance for the tired heart. I never take a single worry inside that room, Grimpy. I like to think of it as my “Land of Beginning Again,” that some good poet wished to find. Sometimes it seems to me that I have a certain amount of peace bottled up in there—which is all my own. Inharmony can’t get into my sanctum sanctorum even by way of a letter. I just know that everything that comes into that room must be fumigated of all fuss and fret. If I continue in this lovely tenor, I shall last

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

a thousand years as well as I can calculate. The absolute, genuine delight that I experience when I open my shades at night and let the moonlight, sifted through a palm tree, light up my four walls with a silver glory that sometimes seems more a part of me than of the world outside, makes money and fame and all that men and women give their lives for, seem in truth a mocking spectacle. Very often in that white light I am sure of a joy that is continually growing within me—such a tangible joy—and I get one bit closer to the knowledge of the Infinite. But best of all comes the last sweet thought before I shut my eyes in sleep—this joy is for all.

Grimpy, I seem never to have entirely lived a new thought until I have told it to you.

Always,

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XXVI

Carnegie Library,  
San Antonio, Texas.

Milady,—

If I were to tell you that a real wagon drove up in front of this very library today and two very live and fat darkies began carrying in a wagon load of the choicest books you can imagine—a gift, my dear—would you believe me? At first we were sure it was a mistake, muttering under our breath that “this was too good to be true,” as if anything ever is. One of the girls—Kitty, I believe—rushed out and ordered the men to load up again as we had ordered no books. Just then a very unassuming man stepped up and explained quietly that as he was leaving town he would be glad if the library could use his collection. If gratitude can be shown by having your breath so taken away as

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

only to reply weakly, "Well, thanks," Kitty was most appreciative.

All afternoon we hardly cared to bother with the public. We simply wanted to gaze at those books. Many of them were bound in limp leather which gave one the impression that these volumes had been very dear to him. I felt as if we were fairly turning his soul wrong side out when we turned through them for marked passages—fascinated with the sense of mystery we all felt. But there seemed to be no finding it out. There were many books of travel and much of philosophy, then a batch of poetry of the tenderest sentiment and I felt sure he had loved and lost. But down beneath we found a book of games and Mother Goose immortalized in color by Jessie Wilcox Smith, and the lovely bachelor idea was completely exploded. Here was pathos, humor, dialectics, history—all dumped into one incongruous pile.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

"Such a mind!" I cried wearily. "What a burden for one brain to hold so many conflicting ideas!"

Toward evening I noticed a gentleman standing near my desk and gazing on the people who were eagerly taking out books to read.

"Must they all go through it?" he asked sadly.

"All books must be charged to them here," I said mechanically.

"Not that," he answered, "but must they all go the long way around and wear out all the fads before they find out that there is only one Book?"

"Only one book?" I said densely.

"The one Book tells it all. But I must have patience with others, for I was years finding it out myself."

"And can you show me," I inquired "this wonderful one book?"

"No," he smiled sweetly, "every one must find it for himself. Just live on the best you can—'shooting the gold

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

thread through everything you touch.' ”

“Is it the——?”

“Don't guess or worry,” he said deprecatingly,—“only be earnest and true to the best that is in you—and you cannot lose your way!”

Saying this he went away—vanished rather than walked. He reminded me of the stories told of the “Comrade in White,” who has appeared in a visionary way to so many of the soldiers in the trenches.

Kitty, with several of the girls at her heels came rushing up to me.

“What did he say? That was the man!”

“What man?” I asked.

“The man who sent the gift of books. What did he tell you?”

“He said he had found a very good book,” I replied darkly. “He didn't mention the title.”

I refused to have him misunderstood by others who hadn't watched him as

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

he talked. There was that about the man that made you feel he had come nearer to truth than the rest of us. I seemed to remember how all through life, problems had to be worked out alone. It is very hard to arrive at the realities of life in the midst of a crowd. We must go up into our mountains of uplift.

It is refreshing these days, Grimpy, to meet one who is willing to be a fool in the eyes of the world that he may keep friends with himself. Here was the secret of his gift to us: these books had been the "long way around" to peace for him. As he talked, he shone with a radiance like one of those "souls like stars that dwell apart in a fellowless firmament." Best of all, Grimpy, he was so certain that I would find the way.

POLLY DEE.



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXVII

Dear Grimpy,—

Sis is having one last fling with the world she says. She writes as if she were a real social "flutter-by." She seems to be mostly on four wheels. Her letters are quite breezy and look and sound as if they might have been written from the back seat. They make me remember that life isn't such a solemn thing after all—just serious! There is such a difference you know, Grimpy. Heaven help us to see it! Just at present she is in Alabama, visiting our aunt, who lives in a manse. It would seem as if she were having a terrific time trying to serve God and mammon. She came home one evening to find herself much out of favor, if not disgraced, because she had played "spotted cards" at a party that afternoon. To suit existing conditions, Uncle had to spend

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

the whole evening readjusting his Sunday sermon.

They have taken several beautiful trips through the virgin pine forests. Some drive and dine and some work in a library.

Here and there in her letters she drops an occasional promise to come on down here. I'd like to have her come the best in the world, but am living in continual agony of being surprised. I want her to notify me at least a week ahead as I would like to "red up" my room into extremest order before she arrives. As it is, I keep darned and mended, and dress continually as if I were going to be in a wreck. I think she has a very keen curiosity to see what sort of duds I have conjured up. My wardrobe is rather laughable, Grumpy, I'll admit, but it's the sort of thing that you don't care about having others make fun of. A very good woman told me the other day that she had never

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

seen another dress quite like mine. She meant to be kind, I have no doubt.

I spend delicious moments thinking what I would do if Sis were to walk into the library one of these mornings. I can't conceive of doing the sane thing at all. I should probably throw my arms wildly about her, give up my job and walk out of the building without my hat. I should turn myself over to her bodily, for I must admit that I am rather weary of having complete charge of me. Of course you'll say, "It is the very best thing that ever happened to Polly to get away from that everlasting mothering she got at home," but that doesn't make it any the less easy. Suppose you had lived to womanhood as I have with a mother and an older sister watching your petticoat to see that it didn't show and planning almost your every thought for you, then suddenly to be turned loose in Texas, not knowing even what is apt

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

to shrink or fade, or "rough up," or muss, and what won't. My only guide in buying this summer's apparel has been a very vivid memory that the ugly is always the more practical, so I have tried as much as possible to shun the beautiful, but withal a great hankering in my heart for just one little flimsy foolish dress.

I can hear Sis saying now, "Honey, whoever made that outfit for you? It's a mess." I should then assume a certain amount of indifference and helplessness and Sis would end by giving me all her last summer's clothes. I would murmur gratefully, "The Lord will provide." It's really wicked, Grumpy, the pretty dresses I've wormed out of that child, but they are so much lovelier than any I could find anywhere—because Sis thinks them out—mostly in church I believe she says.

She and I could really have a very happy time together. I should like to

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

show her the shasta daisies that grow here, and hear her tell one of her extravagant stories. Doubtless we'd plan our lives all over again as we always do when we meet. 'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange, I think, when I look at my family, that I happened to fall in with such excellent people—especially when one's kin is a mere matter of chance.

Your

POLLY DEE.

P. S. Without appearing to want to know, I should ask her quite casually about Peter,—if she ever saw him. And if she volunteered the information (as many have, to me, by letter) that when in town he had been seen with Alice Fortrant, I would say, as generously as I know how, "Good! do you know, Peter Hey will make some one a fine husband!" And he will, though there are only a few of us who thoroughly understand him!

P. D.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXVIII

Dearest Lady of Mine,—

Life is surely a problem, but the solving of it is sweet. As a little school girl I used to find Bud's Arithmetic highly entertaining—there were so many little stories about Mary and her oranges and pennies and the apples that a boy divided among his playmates (although this scarcely seemed true in life!) But all the stories had such an unsatisfactory ending—"how much?" or "what did Mary spend?" as if I could tell! Then Bud told me one day taking the book away from me, that these were problems and not intended to be enjoyed. The fear that some day I might have to answer the awful question as to Mary's finance hung "heavy, heavy over my poor head." After I had an Arithmetic of my own they didn't seem quite so monstrous, but at least very

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

bothersome to this Polly child who had played all her life among the butterflies, morning glories and dolls—never figuring out the why of any situation—just happily grateful that she had been set down in the midst of all this color and humming sounds and the infinite bigness of our back yard.

The farther over in our big Arithmetic we went, the bigger the problems grew until I wondered what this universe was coming to, anyway. Only the Sphinx herself could answer those on the last page. Sometimes after supper when I was very sleepy and could get neither heads nor tails to my problems, after moistening my pencil a great many times, I would wish I didn't have to grow up. Sally Palmer in our school was a very far-sighted little girl, who had held up her hand at the close of the term and said, "Mr. Cross, please, I don't want to be passed.' I kin work these examples so I'll stay here."

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

By and by a few big tears would make strange damp bumps on the figures on my page and Father would take my pencil and say how easy it was. He thought I was intently watching the solution. Instead I was admiring his veiny, intelligent hand with its blue-blue cameo ring. It was indeed a masterful hand to me.

Then came at last the day when I had to learn that Father could not do quite everything. I remember how the morning glories drooped and the whole backyard was downhearted and dismayed.

A few days before, I had taken an afflicted darling doll to Doctor Father to mend. Bud had been unkind enough to say that she was red-headed and deformed in the waist line. due to a leakage of saw dust. Of course a mother never sees these things. Ruby's one redeeming feature, her eyes that opened and shut, fell into the back of her head and had broken. So I took her



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

tenderly to the doll hospital. It was on this particular morning when the morning glories drooped that I heard "the worst." She would be cross-eyed for life, and there was nothing that the hand with the cameo ring could do to remedy it. It wasn't that I loved Ruby any the less, though I dreaded to have her suffer from the jeering remarks of Bud—but it was a blow to find that there was something that Father could not help.

I didn't know it then nor for years after—that this was my first life-lesson—the turning of my heart to an Invisible Hand to work out my problems. The lesson came through this poor limp doll of mine and it was this—that Father and I both are children, and occasionally when it gets night and we are worn out trying to help ourselves, we can always turn over the pencil to another Hand, and watch It write out the answer.

POLLY DEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XXIX

Carnegie Library,  
San Antonio, Texas.

Grimpy, my chum,—

It's funny the queer places in which we find ourselves sometimes, isn't it? The other day Miss Hughes, our librarian, called me into her private office immediately after I had arrived.

"I have a great big task for you to-day, Polly Dee. I think you can do it."

"Then I know I can, if you have faith in me," I said out of a very grateful heart.

"It's this,—I want you to go out to the place where I live and cheer up a young girl who has lost her grip on good. I told the doctor that if anybody could rouse her, you could."

Grimpy, I could have removed mountains that instant without the slightest exertion—I know I could. It isn't in a

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

spirit of vanity that I tell you this, for I realize that Miss Hughes was doing it to help me as much as the girl. It's her way of making a woman out of you—to believe in you.

"I want you to take all of today for that work. You know we must break our routine occasionally to 'live by the side of the road,' don't you?"

I'm such an idiot in the way of shedding tears, I never could do it daintily. So I swallowed my feelings and said, taking her hand clumsily, "You don't seem to realize that you're helping two girls to get on the right track."

Then she told me the girl's story—how she had come here for her health with her mother. A few days ago the mother had left her much improved but very despondent. They had tried everything—the people in the house—petted her, scolded, joked, ignored her, but nothing seemed to work.

"She won't even be pleasant to you,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Polly, so you see it isn't an enviable task at all. Are you equal to it?"

"I like hard knots to untie," I said. "When shall I go?"

"Right now, my dear. We turn the case entirely over to you. Don't come back to the library today. You will find that your hands are very full."

It's too bad that our "seventh heavens" seem to fall when we put our hand to the plough. But, "catching the gleam" is no small thing. No sooner was I out of the office than a wild panic of dismay filled my breast, and the devil kept saying, "You can't! you can't! You're a goose to even try. What will she think of you, a perfect stranger butting in!"—all the while I was putting on my hat. Then I remembered that there was a way out of everything, and I knew it was right for me to find it. Going out, I was busy renovating my own self, knowing that what we would give to others we must first have

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ourselves. Suddenly I had a wonderful inspiration. The very thing! Confidently I went up to the house of my patient. I asked for Julia Slade, and for one weak moment the devil said, "You'd better go home and save making a fool of yourself!" But I persisted. Julia came down in a fine frenzy.

"I don't know you," she said, with one sweeping glance,—“who are you?”

"It's simply unpardonable in me, I suppose," I said, "but Miss Hughes sent me out here to her home to rest and I felt lonesome and asked for someone to talk to me. I'm far away from home, and work every day. I need to hear about somebody else. You can help me. Tell me anything pleasant that has ever happened to you, please," (all this in one breath to keep her from talking), "something glad and funny or lovely."

"I can't see that I have had such a funny time of it," she said with a rather cynical smile.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

"Ever go to college?" I suggested.

"O yes, of course. Why?"

"All right, go on. What happened there?" I said, stretching out on the davenport and shutting my eyes. "What, for instance, did they do on April Fool's day?"

"Put red pepper in the faculty's hymn books, and none of the students would sing in chapel," she said snickering.

"It's a big wonder some goody-goody hadn't spoiled it all," I said.

It wasn't any time, Grumpy, until she was talking my arm off. She grew quite pretty and animated as she told of her college life, recalled old ambitions and lingered happily over her last days in school—and sometimes she said those things which made me think she had forgotten I was there. Suddenly she looked at the clock.

"You poor dear! You must have some lunch," she said in such a mother-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ly tone. "Lie right still and I'll have it here in a jiffy," and she went skipping out to the kitchen, humming an old college melody.

Mr. Devil at this lull made his last appearance. "You're a great big hypocrite," said he, showing his teeth. "Now you hike," I said firmly, "I'm doing this!"

There was a tinkling of ice and glass and silver, and Julia stood at the door with shining eyes, carrying a tray of the coolest, pleasantest lunch you can imagine.

"I just happened to think—what is your name?"

"Polly Dee."

"What a plain little name to match you, a plain little girl. I really had no business telling you all that stuff about myself. Now eat and you'll feel cooler, I know."

If either Miss Hughes or the doctor had looked in upon us that afternoon,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I should probably have been fired bodily. I was waited on, hand and foot. She dressed me in one of her lovely kimono-s, fluffed up my pillows, read to me and played softly some old favorites, "just to soothe you," she said. She became so gentle and tender and kind that I quite forgot I was playing a role and began to feel almost sorry for myself. I hadn't been mothered in months.

Toward evening we walked to the car—arm in arm. "I want to thank you for this day—and your kindness," I said, looking into a wonderfully happy face.

"I'm glad now that you came to me, Polly Dee. I'm sure you have much to be thankful for. Be glad you can work and laugh and look up at the stars. This is a grand old world—after all!" These were her parting words.

Do you think I did wrong, Grumpy? Isn't it infinitely better to lead people into their true selves than finding them



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

down, merely try to weep over them in  
their tatters?

Love,

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXX

Dear little, plain little Grimpy,—

I was about to classify all the great men as those that have fish eyes and those that haven't. I have been interviewing some of them, and find them altogether a very heterogeneous lot—quite an assortment I should say. Some of them led me by the hand out to see their gardens. Some of them looked bleak and wintry when I asked them what was their opinion of a summer vacation for the business man. (These had very fishy eyes and slapped their hands many times on the arms of their chairs by the way of dismissal.) Some were very flattered and made an awful failure trying to hide it; some sneezed; — some fumed; others whined—and a few were perfect dears.

The Italian sculptor was very temperamental—showed me all over his

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

home, back among the palm trees—just the place for a sculptor to mould beautiful hands and feet.

When I told him my errand, he snapped his black eyes and said, "Ah, Miss Dee, my vacation begins when I have a new piece of work to do. Then my studio is heaven to me. Man rests in his right work. When he is continually hunting a holiday, you may know that there is a misfit between him and his work."

"No wonder you can carve in stone, Mr. Coppini," I said, wonderfully inspired. "You cut deeply with sharp tools of thought."

Prior to my visit here, I had talked with several business men and politicians and found them most disheartening—not a flicker of human nature would they show. They were very trite in agreeing that recreation was one of the foremost aids to efficiency. I think their college president must have dish-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ed that out to them at commencement and their poor brains accepted it verbatim—never stopping to figure it out for themselves. Men of such caliber fairly hide behind that word “efficiency.” They should know it has been worked to death, but it seems to give them a very hustling, bustling feeling without any effort on their part.

“Do you never fish or hunt or even play mumbly peg?” But not one vestige of the boy could I arouse in their heavy-laden hearts.

“Poor dears!” I said coming out of their smoke-filled offices, “I’m afraid you’ve entirely lost the vision, and don’t know the way back to the clean, pure thoughts of your youth. You are Scrooges, all of you, and you don’t even understand any longer that there is anything higher than tobacco and shrewd bargaining.” It was then that I realized for the first time what a very fine old man meant when he said to me

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

the other day, "Try never to grow up, Polly Dee, for it will cause you a world of trouble."

That evening I went to see the favorite musician of the city, Mr. Steinheldt. Something told me to save him for the last. I found his wife swinging out on the gallery, half hidden by the moon flowers. She is one of those soft-voiced, sympathetic dames that simply radiate gentleness and refinement. To define her—she seemed more like an evening prayer than anything else. Then I talked to Mr. Steinheldt and found him delightfully simple and modest. I could scarcely believe that he had mastered concertos and conducted great orchestras. He told me very unaffectedly of their summer home where he pottered around for a month with his family, and how until the war, he had always gone to Europe to study.

"But do you know what I enjoy most of all?" he said twinkling.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

"No! what?" I asked.

"Perhaps I should be ashamed—but I'm a regular kid about liking to ride on the train!"

"—And walk down the aisle when it's rough, without holding," I chimed in, "get a drink of water and ask the conductor a lot of questions and wave at the children in the meadows?"

"Ah, you know, Fraulein!" he said amused. "The novelty of having the wheels rumbling under me never wears off,—to hear the whistle, though sometimes it sounds a bit sad toward evening, yet there's a facination that I want to keep!"

Oh that men and women knew, Grumpy, how the world needs us just as children with clean hearts, finding happiness in the little things. It is easier to keep good than it is to unlearn the naughtiness that the world loves to whisper in our ears.

It's that that I can't seem to forget

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

about Peter,—his clean straight life, with nothing to hide. I do want him to get a wife who will appreciate all this as I do. In short, I believe I know just the sort of a comrade Peter needs!

Your child,

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXXI

Dear Grimpy,—

I have been playing some old tunes on a dusty, unused piano tonight in a dark parlor while all the rest of the house were gone. It has brought back a host of college memories, just as if the old instrument kept saying, "And don't you remember?" If college gave me nothing more, it at least has furnished me with a bag of pleasant memories whose bottom I never have reached. I am glad, Grimpy, that I didn't have a profound love affair, for one can waste such a lot of time and energy over it without realizing. I was little, wore a big bow on the top of my head and was wonderfully free. I didn't have beaux—regular sweethearts—just because I was queer little Polly Dee! I did pray for one once—just once—when Ysaye, the famous violinist, came



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

to town. His picture was on every telephone pole. I wanted to go, so I prayed for a "date." Ellen didn't have one either, and we prayed together. Incidentally we were testing the efficacy of prayer. I fiddled and it seemed right that I should go. Ellen's prayer was answered and mine was not. I didn't pray again for a year, and my fiddle went unstrung for many weeks. Then I began playing it for a lad who really listened. He had heard the operas in Germany, and Spanish and Hawaiian music in California. Whole evenings he listened, never saying a word. At ten he left with not a word more than he meant. Before nor since I have not met with such a frank, clean, clear-cut friendship as his was.

I remembered the dreamer lad who used to come up to us as we were hurrying to class and say in a far-away voice "Tell me, what is the summum bonum in life?" I wonder what I told him then

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

—watermelon, perhaps! One lad, a very fastidious fellow, told him, "Er—clean sheets every night!" The dreamer left us in deep disgust for our superficiality. I know what I should tell him now—I can't name it but I can feel it—at some times much plainer than others: a certain lifted sense which seems to whisper, "Why not turn it over? Do you know you are handling the world wrong side out? Turn the seamy side in and see what a thing of beauty you have."

Then there were the horseback rides we took. When examinations and note books piled up, when professors waxed grouchy and unreasonable and there was that suffocated feeling caused usually by work left undone, then it seemed best to send for the saddle horses and gallop away as if we were never coming back again. It really seemed quite probable to us that we were gone for good—! We lost ourselves on the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

river road and arrived in town without knowing how the horses brought us there. I can see us now coming in to dinner, much dishevelled and breathless, with hair down, minus combs and belt buckles—to be given black looks by the seniors in dinner dress, and never mind them at all—just feel sorry for them, that they must always be so clean and formal! Examinations were no trick at all after a jaunt like that and note books fairly wrote themselves.

I remembered the garden parties at Rosa Bower—the home of one of the Professors—when the Japanese lanterns winked at us through the trees and how we swung in the old rope swing up into the dark tree tops—clear away from dark yesterdays and fear-filled tomorrows. But to swing tonight alone! I felt complete in myself and all-sufficient—except perhaps for someone to push the swing!

It was a very old-fashioned hymn

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

that brought out the last memory. It said, "Don't you remember the night you stole softly up to your room? Something very lovely had happened and you felt as if you were being carried about on a fleecy white cloud." Now don't be misled, Grimpy. You could never guess in a million years. It was just as pure and heavenly as angels' wings! I thought I was all alone in the long corridor. Suddenly I felt myself face to face with Barbette. She grabbed me by both arms and pulled me under the light. "Polly Dee! what has happened to you?"

"Why?"

"Why, Polly, you look radiant—almost pretty."

"Do I?" I said gladly, going to my mirror. "Well sure 'nough, there is a change," I said meditatively. "Just a little more soul I guess—a little bigger glimpse of what is altogether lovely"—

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

but the secret stayed fast in my heart  
to this very day.

Ah, Grimpy, "Heard melodies are  
sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXXII

Friend Grimpy,—

There seems to be continually presenting itself to my consciousness a mad ambition to be somebody and accomplish something in the world. For the moment it brings with it a temporary exhilaration and enthusiasm as if I were treading on air, and flying about busily I assure myself, "Truly this is the life!" But no sooner have I plunged into it, determined not to let anything separate me from my purpose, than all sorts of fears present themselves, fears that there isn't time enough in one's life; that my family might think I was making a fool of myself! These quite talk me out of my sublimer moments, and I find myself apparently just where I was before.

Doubtless my father didn't guess what a panic he was planting in "my

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

breastie," when he bought me my first violin book and printed in bold letters on the front page—"Polly Dee, Violinist." Instead of practicing I oftentimes found it more profitable to dream of the time when I should go to Europe to study. I even wrote letters dated from a Mecca of Music twenty years later, to my seat mate at school, who was then in her lively imagination superintending an orphanage in Tokio, Japan.

Then one day when my little red violin made very unpleasant discords and squeaked through no fault of my own so far as I could see, I decided it was a mistake—I was undoubtedly cut out for a poet. As yet there was no immediate need for working at my calling, but it was pleasant to sit out there under our apple tree and picture the sort of a house I would have, with some very restful and significant name for it. The lethargy of dreaming without doing was growing upon me.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

A young and very poor young man who would be a sculptor came into the library the other day for some books on art. He carried his arm in a sling. Womanlike, I turned the rest of the public aside, and out of sympathy gave my individual attention to serving him. He had come here to study under the famous Coppini, and had found him gone for the summer. He pulled out of his pocket a small box which appeared to be very precious to him.

"These are what I worked on of nights all winter long on the ranch," he said, taking out several cameos, with the same face on them all. "The face is my mother's," he hastened to explain. "I don't care for girls as a rule. I hope you don't mind my frankness," he said smiling a little.

Whatever I said about the beauty of the cameos I wanted to unsay a moment afterwards. He saw I didn't understand the true loveliness of them, and



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

what they meant to him as his first crude attempt at the beautiful which he felt within him, so he put them back quietly into their box.

"But you can't work now, can you?" I said, motioning to his arm.

"Oh, yes," he said, almost joyously. "We can't stop just for a few broken bones. I am now modeling the woman at my boarding house, and I find I can do very well with my left hand."

Instantly I felt a kinship with this soul. I began to tell him that I too had dreamed a dream. "And what if there isn't time enough to do all we want to do?" I said, the old limiting thought creeping in again, as it had so many times before.

"What of that? We go right on. There is no quitting anything as immortal as one's best self," he said confidently, as if he had thought all this out before.

Grimpy, when I meet such folks as

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

this even occasionally, I have a very joyous feeling that maybe after all we are beginning to get near to the "real warm things of life." Perhaps we have been in an ugly dream—a dream of trying to outdo one another; a dream that there wasn't half enough for all, and we must make mad haste to get a good big share for ourselves. As we wake up, we see about us those who are still in a heavy sleep, "as men adream," chasing the butterflies of fashion and the glittering inducements never fulfilled. Ambition then appears to us to be the sorry substitute for the "divine unrest" ever busying itself in our souls. All this came to me Sunday morning, Grimpy, when the singer sang these words: "Journey on unto the hill crest, —you will find the vales of peace."

POLLY LEE.

# THE GRIMPY LETTERS

## XXXIII

San Antonio, Texas.

Dear Grimpy,—

Miss Hughes, the librarian, called to me to come play early one morning. We would run away from the library to the woods, build our fire, broil our bacon and renew our souls. They needed to be stretched out once more under dense trees, and there in the half hush of slightly stirring branches to know how supreme good is. We needed to do actual labor with our hands, lug fallen branches, persuade a blaze with dead leaves and feel smoke once more in our eyes. I'd rather be considered a good playmate, I sometimes think, than a good workman. 'Most anybody can work.

As I dressed roughly for my skip-to-maloo, I couldn't help smiling at the way things turn out. I decided I might

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

as well stop planning—just wait and see—but oh, everlastingly hope! And then sometimes we haven't hoped for half what we get. If someone had told me a month ago that I was to be playing in the woods on such a day with this dear lady, Mistress True-Heart, I should have said, "You're another!"

There is something very interesting and appetizing about a breakfast that one goes a long way after and rises early in the morning to make ready for. It isn't so much what we eat, but where we eat, and the nice sounds we hear.

The morning seemed to be outdoing itself in freshness. I should be glad if heaven were a continual state of "early in the morning," that is, if the unpleasant feature of getting up could be eliminated. The Lotus Eaters must have been a languid lot to have thoroughly enjoyed a Land of Always Afternoon. It was so early when I went through town that I couldn't decide whether the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

folks I met were just going to bed or just getting up. Children rubbed their eyes as they came out with expectant faces to greet the new day. One little child was making a joyous escape in his night clothes with his mother pursuing. The cool flowers that the sun shuts up, were shaking the dew from their cups. It began to show country from the car window, and once I looked out, as a cool wind blew over me and not a huisatche or a Mexican was in sight. Seemed as if I were back in Indiana. Miss Hughes was waiting for me at the end of the line.

"We'll be as free as birds, today," she said, putting down all professional barriers between us. "I have an idea you know how to play like a good fellow." There is that in her uplifted face and eyes that suggests tree tops, Grimpy. She has pleasant little wrinkles about her mouth and eyes, and smiling, smooth white teeth, that seem almost

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

as pleasant and kind as her eyes. The very meanest word I ever heard her use was "disgusting," which she modified a moment later as if it had been a slip of her tongue.

We both remarked what a genial mood the woods seemed to be in that morning. We crackled through a lot of brush and had such a time to decide which was the very nicest of all the little nooks that met our view. One offered particularly big inducements: the river close by, a fallen log, a grape vine, dense shade and a swinging bridge just over the way. Didst ever eat bacon in the woods, milady, while a red bird sang over your head and a storm was gathering?

"Now if this were back home, the folks would be stewing about us and wondering if we were under cover," she said smiling. "Bless you, child, how easily you can turn comrade. I just

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

love to be talked to free and easy and even to be disputed occasionally."

After our quiet little meal was over, the dishes washed, and we had beaten our fire to a smouldering heap of ashes, the fallen tree furnished us seats right over the water where we could reach down if we liked and dip our hands into its coolness. The boughs of the trees overhead had separated the rays of the sun and singled out a wonderful purple to color the water where it ran a little swifter. This color must have suggested to Mistress True-Heart the little refrain which she kept singing and humming:

"O, come to Kew in lilac time, in  
lilac time, in lilac time,  
O come to Kew in lilac time, it  
isn't far from London."

I had the very blessed feeling all morning as we babbled and twittered contentedly out on the limbs of that

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

fallen tree, sometimes telling one another snatches of our past lives, that I was on the eve of a new and beautiful friendship. That is one of the few things in life that can not be coaxed or pushed. It just comes, we know not why.

POLLY DEE.



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXXIV

Dearest Grimpy, —

I'm sure you'd like our little family. Mr. and Mrs. Bonn live in the front room with the big bay window that looks out on everything up and down the street. Across the hall from them Bob, our noisy boy, hangs out, and beyond the open gallery, last and least, lives Polly Dee.

Mrs. Bonn is our little lady in the wheel chair, who sits in the bay window and watches for us all of evenings. Bob says it's that that keeps him clean and straight all the day. She is such a lady—so queenly with dainty, tasselled shoes, Japanese silk jackets, and a wonderful ring that sparkles for us along with her smile. It seems sometimes as if she knew when we haven't been true to our best selves, and then the ring looks very dull indeed, and

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

she smiles only compassionately upon us. Other nights, when all is well and good with us, Bob and I go in and sit with her during "candle-lightin' time." She feeds us from her supper tray, and how good it does taste from her white hands. It isn't that she's sick that she sits in the chair all the time. Her cheeks are full of color as if she had just come in from a race down the hill. She just doesn't walk for awhile. Sometimes when I look at her I fancy that she takes races that we know nothing about—pell-mell down grassy slopes holding hands with others—perhaps she has Bob long—and stops at the bottom to turn in her loose strands of hair. I think Bob must have felt this too one evening when Lady Bonn was making our work-a-day hearts light with her laugh and gentle ways. Bob was serious as he sat looking at his short, clumsy legs and feet.

"You are a genius, Lady Bonn. What

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

a queer notion I've had, that legs are for climbing. Now I know they are for us who do not see and hear and understand, and who must move about to glean from life. Thoughts climb and souls grow, and legs may take us away rather than bring us to."

He is so sweet with her that we can't help liking him, though there are times when he thinks he has a perfect right to rant and rave when Liza loses the tassels out of his silk pajamas, or forgets to starch his cuffs. He has a delightfully breezy way of entering the house and just taking possession of all of us. His favorite stunt is to pull in about eleven-thirty with a watermelon or ice cream, knock on our doors and tell us to come on and have some fun. We all declare we will have none of this—"ice cream in the middle of the night and all the house in bed!" But it isn't many minutes before we are getting out spoons and saucers and

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Bob sweetens us with one of his big laughs. Perhaps grown people are more like children in the middle of the night than at any other time.

We are a bunch of dreamers and plan how we'll live together always. We build this little gray brick over a hundred different ways. "And Lady Bonn will then go on long hikes with Polly and me," Bob says joyfully, looking confidently up at her with those wicked eyes of his that wink automatically. She lays her lovely jewelled hand on his shoulder and says so surely, "Now don't forget—you and Polly and me!" We all feel sure of this, and very patiently wait till Lady Bonn steps out of her chair and walks to meet us in the cool of the day.

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXXV

Grimpy,—

I have come to look for at least one bright flash in every day, and it seldom disappoints me. Yesterday morning as I sat in front of my Neighbor's fire, in one of her big chairs, while she sat at my feet on a stool drying her hair, a little black-eyed woman with a round face, a glad smile and much color opened the door and walked in. Without ceremony she handed my Neighbor a bunch of larkspur and roses, then took from under her arm a book, opened it to a marked passage, and said, "Here, read this to us." It was about gypsies who have souls, and the stars they live under. It may have been a little vague in places, but I think it was that very thing that we liked. But the best of all was when the little black-eyed woman opened up her own gypsy heart to us.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

There was something so rhythmical and musical about the most ordinary remark that she made, that I sometimes thought she spoke in rhyme. She told of her garden, the night sounds she had loved on a prairie in Colorado, and the big couch in her own home with the leopard rug over it, where she lay every afternoon with her books, and wandered.

How refreshing she seemed! I think I didn't say a word, but just gloried in her silently. I soon found I didn't have to. When she left, she took my hand with real tenderness and said, "I feel your gypsy heart reaching out to me. There are so few of them in the world. Come and see me." "May I bring another?" I asked. "If you're sure it's gypsy-made" she said warmly. We went back to the fireplace and punched at the fire, but the warmth that we really wanted had gone out with this little nomad. I went home with the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

Gypsy Book and aglow with a Something New Under the Sun. I could scarcely wait to tell the Doctor about her. (The Doctor is a dentist who eats across the table, roams these hills with me, and fits very nicely into my days.) So I went to my room, and impulsively jotted him down a note which ran something like this:

“Dear Doctor:—I have something nice to show you, a delightful book, much marked and loved. It’s about gypsies. Do let’s be natural and enjoy one another the little time I am to be here. Let’s take this book and go off among the rocks at the foot of the Cliff and read this afternoon. On the way back we’ll drop in and see the little lady herself. You know very well you would rather do this than study for that dental examination, and besides, what does it profit a man to know what happens if you tickle the right heel of a frog? Wouldn’t the boarders be dumbfound-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

ed if they saw me slipping this under your door? I shall do it very noiselessly in my bedroom slippers."

It wasn't five minutes later that I heard a queer, unaccustomed shuffling outside in the hall, and a little flicker of yellow paper appeared under the crack of my door! It read:

"I shall let the dental books go to thunder and join you and the gypsies at the Cliff this p. m. That's what I've been trying to decide,—what does it profit a man about that frog's hind leg? If you get this, wipe your mouth three times on your napkin on coming to the table."

The afternoon at the Cliff was ideal. We read until the sun began to go down, then came back the rocky way home. I was much taken with the afternoon Doctor, and compared him very favorably with the Doctor at the lunch table who discussed gutta percha fillings and the rise in the price of porce-



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

lain. There is never the feeling in the presence of the Doctor that you have been ridiculous or foolish when you have been simply trying to live up to your best self.

I felt a broken promise fretting itself in my heart. "I know! We were to go to see the little gypsy lady" I said to him. So we found the path that leads to her back door. With the gentle rain now peppering down on our uncovered heads, we moved rather silently and with some ceremony, as if on a particular quest. Even as I walked by the side of her violet-edged flower beds, these gracious words dropped with the rain:

"Not God in gardens, when the even is cool?

Nay, but I have a sign,

'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

My little lady was at her door to meet us, holding out both her hands. Be-

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

yond her in the pleasant, big living room, we could see a fire in the fireplace, ready to dry us out. "I felt impelled to build this fire," she said leading us to it, "and all the time I was wondering who could be coming. The hearth dogs on the andirons grinned mischievously and seemed to say, 'Build a big one. They'll be good and wet when they get here.' " I couldn't resist giving the Doctor's coat a surreptitious pull, as much as to say, "See what a dear she is. You've got to love her as I do."

It was just the sort of a place I should have expected to find her. Here were her books and pictures; there in the corner was her baby grand; in the center her big library table with a cozy lamp, and by the side of the table her Chinese hour-glass chair, where she was even now curled up in unconventional comfort. There was the couch with the leopard rug, her desk, and the

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

bright Indian rugs which gave the only touch of color to the otherwise gray room. We felt a stillness and peace come over us as she talked, and a longing for more of the divine in our lives. It was as if God had walked in there with us out of that garden!

The Doctor said as we left, "I am glad we found the path to your door. I have heard of paths healing, but I trust the one from our door to yours never will."

On the way home, we picked a huge bouquet of rain lilies, and I thought as I held them up in the dark where they looked so white and shining, we might pretend almost that we had been star-gathering.

Thy

POLLY DEE.

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

### XXXVI

Grimpy, darlin',—

Hear, O Grimpy, and give ear, O ye heavens, to this that happened to me just exactly as I am about to tell it to you!

For the last three weeks I have been staying with the Carlton children while my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Carlton, are in New York. Night before last, the four kiddies were tucked in their beds out on the long sleeping porch, and had promised with what seemed to be very good faith to go right off to sleep. Little Judy said she would if Alice wouldn't talk; Alice said she wouldn't talk if Mary Dean wouldn't giggle; Mary Dean said she wouldn't think of giggling if John didn't kick her bed; whereupon John made some hazy defense about his foot getting hot and he was obliged to cool it off! Leaving them with the threat that the first one

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

I heard would have to come inside for the night, I went down-stairs on my round of locking up the big house and turning out the lights.

Then I settled myself in a billowy chair, just to enjoy myself, to think pleasant thoughts, plan a story or two, and recall the sweet smart things my youngsters had said that day. They are so precious at times! The night watchman thumped by every half hour with his heavy cane, to let me know that all was well. Curled up in the depths of that chair, with a wonderful peace of mind for one who had been "minding the babies" all day, it seemed reasonably possible that there could never come a ruffled, troubled time into my life again.

The door bell gave a short, commanding ring, and I heard heavy footsteps on the gallery. I assured myself that I wasn't afraid, meanwhile turning my lavalier around so it would hang down

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

my back out of sight, and putting my ring in my mouth; with a tiny prayer, "I pray the Lord my soul to keep," I opened the door. It was a soldier, Grimpy, a very elongated one, who just stood there stupidly, and didn't say a word.

"Would you mind telling me what you want?" I said after an interminable silence.

"I want YOU, Polly Dee!" he said, taking both my hands in his. Of course I knew it was Peter, for the simple reason that no one else had ever wanted me. So I let him in.

"Peter, what are you doing with this uniform on, and did you drop from the stars?" I asked, standing him off and admiring him,—not once trying to conceal my joy that he was there.

So it was, Grimpy, (are you listening?) that he told me how he had come down with the troops to the Border; how he had wanted to come to see me,

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

but didn't dare, because it seems I had written him a letter and told him ruthlessly, he says, that I never wanted to lay eyes on him again. Wasn't that ill-mannered, dear little lady? Anyway he took the whole thing to heart, just as he always does, and wouldn't let me know we were in the same town, both of us far, far from home. That morning he had received a letter telling him my address, and without allowing himself to think it over, he came.

"You blessed soldier," I said. "Now let's be glad you found me and enjoy tonight."

My well-trained ear heard a patter of feet on the stairway. "Do you want to see something sweet and naughty?" I whispered. "Come with me." We found the four of them in their pajamas, slipping down the big stairs.

"We thought it was Daddy," they hastened to explain. Before I could give orders, Peter had all but Alice

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

(who had modestly run at the sight of the stranger-soldier) gathered up in his arms and was making them comfortable on his lap.

"That's Mr. Peter" I explained to them, "and since he wants to hold you for awhile, and he's a soldier, we'll have to let him have his way."

He in his trappings went through a rigorous inspection. John was lost in admiration of his puttees. Judy liked his "beauty pins" on his shoulder, for bless you, he is a Captain! Mary Dean batted her black eyes and chronicled the family for him, including the dog and Miss Polly. You should have seen Peter laugh.

"Are you Miss Polly's brudder?" Judy asked sleepily.

"No, child," he said, "I'm just a soldier."

"And not her uncle or cousin?" she inquired further.

"No, baby, but if you can get me re-



## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

lated to Miss Polly, I'll give you a round dollar."

He carried them upstairs, and together we put them back to bed. Nothing would do but they must say their prayers again on my shoulder, and thank the good Lord for the "long soldier, Mr. Peter." (This was nearly the undoing of Peter!) He told them a bedtime story, until every trowsled head had dropped, and they were fast asleep. Reverently, almost, we stood looking at them, then turned out the light and came down-stairs and out on the terrace under the sentinel palms.

"I'm not afraid of even the watchman, when I look out and see these stately palms, standing guard there in the night," I remarked as we looked up at their leaves, shiny in the moonlight.

"Polly, after living in the midst of such ideal surroundings, it makes me afraid you won't be content to come back and live among plain folks any

## THE GRIMPY LETTERS

more. Will you?" At that moment Peter seemed the symbol of all that was genuine and lovable in the world.

"I feared that too for awhile, Peter," I said thoughtfully, "but tonight it is very clear to me that I shall be happier when I get back to those who have to work, and whistle their troubles away."

We are coming home,—Peter and I! The Mexican Border excitement has subsided, and the Indiana troops leave next week. Would this letter lead you to believe that I have undergone a change of heart? Why, after all, should I tell you anything, when you already know me through and through? Suffice it to say, it was a glorified evening when we mended our lives and began over again. The old Wanderlust has gone,—with his coming!

"Stay at home, my heart, and rest; Home-keeping hearts are happiest."

I have such a contented feeling, I should like to purr. Hast a blessing for Peter and

POLLY DEE!







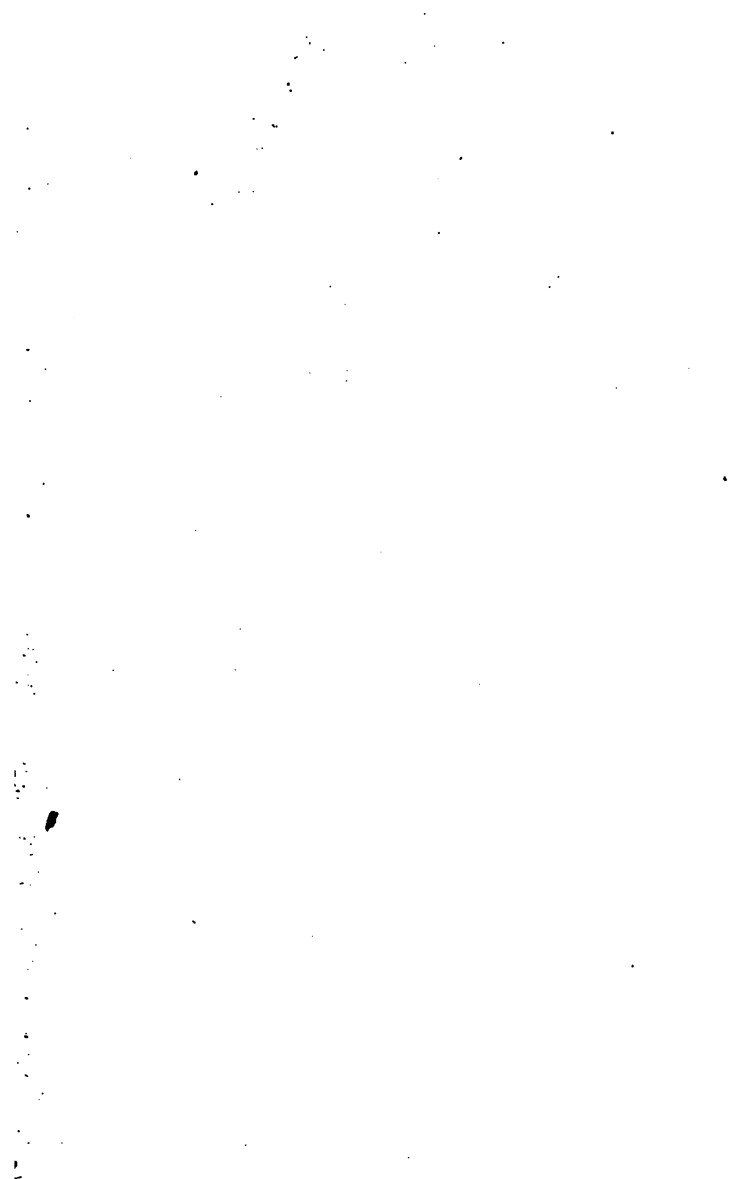


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